VISIT…

THE EMERGENCE OF THE BOMBAY FILM INDUSTRY, 1913-1936

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List of Abbreviations

ARBP	Annual Report of the Police of the Town and Island of Bombay
BC	Bombay Chronicle
BJP	Proceedings of the Judicial Department, Government of Bombay
BLP	Proceedings of the Legislative Department, Government of Bombay
BLSGP	Proceedings of the General Department – Local Self-Government, Government of Bombay
BPPWD	Proceedings of the Public Works Department, Government of Bombay
CI	Census of India
CS	Cinema Sansar
EIC	Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema
FL	Filmland
ICC	Indian Cinematograph Committee
ICCE	Indian Cinematograph Committee Evidence
IMPC	Indian Motion Pictures Congress
IMPPA	Indian Motion Pictures Producers Association
ITSJ	Indian Talkie 1931-1956: Silver Jubilee Souvenir
LOA	Light Of Asia
L/PJ	Public and Judicial Department Records
MAS	Modern Asian Studies
MPSI	Motion Pictures Society of India
MS	Mumbai Samachar
MSA	Maharashtra State Archives
OIOC	Oriental and India Office Collections
RAP	Report on the Administration of the Presidency
RNNP	Report on the Native Newspapers
ROH	Royal Opera House
SNP	Statement for Newspapers and Periodicals Published
SV	Sanj Vartaman
TC	The Cinema
TOI	Times Of India
TOID	The Times of India Directory
TOIS	The Times of India Sesquicentennial
VW	Varieties Weekly

Introduction

Cinema in Bombay began in the late nineteenth century with cinematograph exhibitions in tents and hotels, and bioscope companies who put up their machines in existing theatre halls. Until 1912, the exhibition of films was entirely dependent on imported films. From 1913, the sporadic efforts of individual filmmakers like DG Phalke and SN Patankar laid Bombay cinema's foundation, although a favourable market situation for Bombay films did not emerge until the success of Phalke's 1918 film *Lanka Dahan*. The early years of Bombay cinema remain a fascinating epoch of the beginnings of what is now the most prolific film industry in the world. Fascinating because it maintained the status of a 'public secret', with the educated elite staying away from the disreputable medium. The colonial government, requiring to control mainly the politically dangerous cultural activities of the educated clases, likewise paid little attention to the industry by regulating film content or industrial activity. It was not 'quaint' or 'authentic' enough to catch the ethnographic eye either. It belonged to a demimonde of Indian cultural life that the British were loath to regulate directly. Such areas were left to the 'community' to take care of. Thus, it had the aura of a 'public secret' – a public form of entertainment restricted culturally to the private world of Indian community life. This gap in the consciousness of the Indian educated classes and the colonial government has guided much of the blindness towards the history of the industry even in latter-day scholarship on cinema.

However, the medium caught the imagination of certain parts of the population – men fascinated by the new technology, modernising young people being drawn into the cinemania of urban Bombay or astute businessmen with some disposable capital. The cinema hall was an enchanted world filled with forbidden pleasures and thrills, that attracted tired office-workers, star-struck students and beleaguered workers. Over time, sections of this initial constituency turned to the business of the cinema itself as performers, directors, writers, producers or critics. It was the educated young who ultimately made the cinema acceptably respectable. This thesis is the story of the passage of Bombay cinema, through the 1920s into the mid-1930s, from its local and somewhat disreputable roots in the 'public-private' universe of Bombay's demimonde of entertainment into 'respectability' at an all-India level. The study attempts to delineate the relationship between the market for Bombay films, the changing class, religious and regional profile of the audiences and the techniques employed by the industry to tackle the changing demands of the market while simultaneously trying to define its position *vis-à-vis* cultural change in the subcontinent. The story of Bombay cinema in the first two decades of its existence is the story of weaning the educated classes away from their class prejudices towards increasing participation in the industry. It remains an ambiguous cultural presence in Indian society to this day. It is still the 'cinema-mad' youth (in most cases, of the lower classes) or the hard-headed businessman (usually the fly-by-night speculator) who define the identity of the medium. With the bourgeoisie increasingly entering the industry over the last two decades, the battle for 'respectability' rages on.

A Survey of Current Historiography

The history of early Bombay cinema has largely been consigned to the realm of cultural amnesia. There is, till date, no full-length study of the silent era and the early

talkies. Barring the introductory chapters of Erik Barnouw and S Krishnaswamy's[1] survey of the Indian film industry and Firoze Rangoonwalla's history of Indian cinema, English-language studies of Bombay cinema have paid scant attention to silent cinema and the early talkie years.[2] Documentation of early film production has largely been seen as a necessary step of providing a foundational myth for Indian cinema. The same can be said of Rangoonwalla's study, although it provides considerable empirical detail on early cinema production. Panna Shah's sociological analysis of the Bombay industry in the early 1950s has a few chapters on the history of early Indian cinema. Though largely silent on the early silent era, her study of early talkie production presents an analysis of fandom in the context of the star phenomenon and film-production styles through a perusal of fan letters written to the leading film magazine of the times – *FilmIndia*. Apart from this however, the monograph deals mainly with contemporary film production.[3]

Occasional articles by film scholars in magazines, newspapers and commemorative volumes to mark the many jubilee celebrations of Indian cinema have been the extent of the historical coverage of the industry in its early years.[4] The approach in such material has been mainly anecdotal with little effort to place the industry in its socio-cultural context. Yet despite its random approach to cinema history, *NaiDuniya*'s special issue on stars provides more information about the silent era than established histories do.[5] Such works resuscitate little-known stars of the silent era like Ermeline and Gulab and provide vital biographical and filmographical details.

Regional scholarship has produced a number of useful volumes on early cinema, although here too, silent cinema receives far less interest than the talkies.[6] The early chapters of Ushakant Mehta's *Gujarat Chalachitra Parampara* remain the most thorough study of Bombay silent cinema till date. Combining the empirical approach with the social-historical, the volume, for the first time, provided valuable insight into the socio-cultural context of early Bombay cinema. Studio histories and career trajectories of directors and performers set against the general cultural ethos of Bombay and Gujarat make Mehta's study the only one to take the film-cultural approach towards the history of early Bombay cinema. It synthesises scattered data and provides useful indicators on sources through its use of diverse archival material such as newspaper advertisements and film magazines.

A brief resurgence of interest in silent cinema in the 1990s resulted in the compilation of the first definitive filmography of the silent period.[7] This coincided

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[1] Erik Barnouw and S Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film* (New York, 1963).
[2] Firoze Rangoonwalla, *Seventy Five Years of Indian Cinema* (New Delhi, 1975).
[3] P Shah, *The Indian Film* (Bombay, 1950).
[4] Some of the early issues of the magazine *Cinema Vision India*, published in the 1980s, were dedicated to early Indian cinema.
Considerable information can also be found in two commemorative volumes *Indian Talkie, 1931-1981: Fifty Years of Indian Talkies* (Delhi, 1981) and *Seventy Years of Indian Cinema, 1913-1983* (Delhi, 1983) edited by TM Ramachandran.
[5] *NaiDuniya*, Special Issue, 1990.
[6] For early Bombay cinema, see Ushakant Mehta, *Gujarat Chalachitra Parampara* (Delhi, 1993).
For a collection of information about stars, directors, producers and studios, see Vitthal Pandya, *Sapnanan Saudagar* (Bombay, 1995).
[7] Compiled by Virchand Dharamsey in Suresh Chabria,Virchand Dharamsey and Paolo Cherchi Usai (eds.), *Light of Asia* (Poona, 1995). For an earlier filmography, see Firoze Rangoonwalla, *Indian Filmography: Silent and Hindi Films, 1897-1969* (Bombay, 1970).

with the screening of extant silent cinema footage at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival in 1993. Virchand Dharamsey's filmography remains the most authoritative guide for scholars seeking to study the industry in the silent era. Not only does it present an exhaustive list of film titles, it is also the first to list cast and production details – invaluable tools for the film historian. A narrative of early cinema begins to emerge from the details alone – the number of films produced rises, personnel change tracks, new studios emerge and new kinds of films with new kinds of names begin to be made.

1994 also saw the publication of the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, edited by Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, which, for the first time, provided a methodical survey of available information about early cinema. The *Encyclopaedia* is the single most important information base for silent cinema. Its chronology provides valuable information about the cultural context of early film production and a potted history of the growth of Indian film journalism. In addition to entries on films, performers, directors and studios, it possesses an exhaustive bibliography of existing scholarship and archival sources on Indian cinema. With the publication of Dharamsey's filmography and the entries in the *Encyclopaedia* (substantially compiled by Dharamsey), the history of early Bombay cinema began to take on a clearer focus. For the first time, it was catalogued and classified with an eye towards significant historical detail – empirical and analytical. If Dharamsey's filmography provides the film historian a jigsaw of names and numbers to speculate upon, the *Encyclopaedia* fleshes out large parts of the picture by providing vital historical detail.

A survey of the existing historiography on early Bombay cinema reveals four major trajectories of scholarly interest in the subject. The first, exemplified by the works of Barnouw and Krishnaswamy and Rangoonwalla, constructs early cinema as an interesting, if somewhat quaint, phase in the industry's development. Their documentation of the growth of the early industry is largely schematic, focusing mainly on the perceived landmarks of Indian film history. Indeed, the notion of cinema as an industry necessitates the production of a potted foundational narrative of, as one pioneering volume on early film history puts it, "fearless pioneers, of 'firsts', of adventure and discovery, of great masters and masterpieces."[8] An anecdotal approach to the sociological context of film consumption is bracketed within the larger narrative of growth and expansion of the industry under the stewardship of pioneers. On the whole, the largely empirical documentation has been in broad brush-strokes in order to hurry along to the more 'authentic' talkie cinema.

The second approach has been filmographical – painstakingly detailing the growth of the industry in terms of sheer numbers and names. Given the acute paucity of rigorously organised data for early cinema, such enterprises become a necessity and indeed challenge the first approach. In bland and mathematically precise outline, filmographies conjure up a teeming picture of the film industry, abruptly interjecting strange names and entities to interrupt the seductive incantatory charm of the classical heroic ballad of early cinema.

The third kind of narrative about early Bombay cinema has much in common with the classical-historical and the filmographic approaches, but goes beyond them to provide a nuanced documentation of the historical trajectories of the industry. Indeed, Mehta's study of early Bombay cinema forms part of a larger history of Gujarati cinema. In the classical-historical mould, he tries to posit Gujarati cinema and culture

[8] Thomas Elasaesser (ed.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London, 1990), p.3.

at the root of the subcontinent's most powerful film industry, an heritage largely forgotten in both industrial and historiographical practice. In trying to rescue a heroic narrative of Gujarati cinema as the foundational myth of Bombay cinema, Mehta tries, all at once, to garner respectability for the culturally neglected Gujarati industry in contemporary times, remind the Bombay industry reproachfully of its forgotten Gujarati past and project his own narrative as an antidote to the perceived decline of the Gujarat industry. If reminded of their glorious shared heritage(s), both the Bombay and Gujarat industries might benefit by resuscitating links lost in the hoary past. However, his study goes well beyond the classical-historical and the filmographic approaches in synthesising a variety of historical data to present the only existing narrative of early Bombay film culture.

Finally, a number of articles on the cinema of DG Phalke and some extant silent films in the *Journal of Arts and Ideas* contribute to the ongoing debate about Indian modernity.[9] In some ways, with their focus on the foundational myths of Indian cinema, these articles remain a subtype of the classical-historical narrative of early Indian cinema. The focus changes, however, from the story to the event of Indian modernity in the colonial context. In unpacking the event, the authors analyse film and biographical narratives to comment on the negotiation of modernity by film pioneers belonging to traditional societies. In such approaches, the narrational structure of films reflects the rise of modernist bourgeois ideology in India against the backdrop of larger historical negotiations between tradition and modernity by early cultural pioneers. The historical context is, by and large, telescoped to a single strand – that of colonialism and Indian nationalism. Heavily borrowing from post-structuralist theorists like the *Subaltern Studies* historians, Louis Althusser, Edward Said and Frederic Jameson amongst others, these essays remain important for postcolonial studies.

Critiques, Sources and Methods

Critiques

Existing paradigms of writing about Indian cinema have focused on Bombay cinema either as a commodified form of entertainment or as reflective of the ideologies of the nation-state. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy's narrative move from a descriptive history of early cinema to histories of 'serious cinema' with very little said about popular cinema. The focus is inevitably on social cinema and its relationship with national ideologies. The sense of the industrial nature of cinema is dissolved in considerations of ideologies. Rangoonwalla's narratives, though focusing on the development of the industry, does so by neatly categorising film production into evolving frameworks of style, content and modes of address built around the oeuvre of key personalities. Inevitably, such narratives 'begin' with the talkies in the 1930s.

Later writings too have seldom veered away from a focus on social cinema and even those that have done so have ultimately sought to subsume popular cinema under larger narratives of generalised ideological paradigms such as the growth of the 'feudal family romance',[10] the differentiation of the 'public' and the 'private' in representational regimes,[11] cinematic configurations of modernity and tradition or

[9] For the main argument, see Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'The Phalke Era: Conflict of Traditional Form and Modern Technology', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, nos. 25-26, 1987.
[10] Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (Delhi, 1998).
[11] Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'India's Silent Cinema: A 'Viewer's View' in Chabria et al. (1995).

representations of class, gender and communal configurations.[12] In short, films have been seen as 'works of ideology'.[13] Popular cinema is seen as a configuration of the relational dynamics between the state and its citizens and between elite and popular cultures. Thus contemporary Bombay cinema is seen as representing the growing disjunction between the ideologies of the state and the ruling classes, and the aspirations of those they 'appellate' as citizens, while the earlier cinema is seen as the vision of a nationalist elite propagating the ideals of the Nehruvian nation state.[14] Thus these narratives too share with conventional narratives of the industry the distinction between an earlier 'nationalist' popular social cinema and the later commodified popular cinema, notwithstanding the fact that both arise from the same locus.

It is not surprising therefore that such considerations have coloured the very limited writings available on early Bombay cinema. The only valid master narrative of cultural context allowed to intrude into its seamless tale of industrial growth is that of nationalism and nationalist consciousness in the colonial period. One of the main contentions of theorists about early Indian cinema, as announced in the very title of Rajadhyaksha's essay on Phalke, is the 'conflict of traditional form and modern technology' supposedly evident from Phalke's framing techniques. Utilising the concept of *darsan* (the devotee's gaze) formulated by Diana Eck[15] and Judith Gutman's theory of frontal composition in Indian photography,[16] Rajadhyaksha contends that Phalke's cinema presented a case of modern technology being used to present an 'Indian' cinematic frame. The frontal presentation of cinematic action, according to the author, does not invite the spectator to read cinematic action by drawing his/her vision according to Western perspectival spatial construction. The frontal presentation emphasises the spectacle of cinema rather than story-telling based on individualisation of characters with whom the spectator identifies individually. Phalke's cinema therefore addresses the community of watchers rather than the individual spectator. Moreover, it is seen as creating a mode of resistance to Western specular regimes and providing a platform for mobilising mass popular nationalist sentiments.[17] In a later essay, Rajadhyaksha connects this formulation with Partha Chatterjee's characterisation of Indian nationalism consisting of a bifurcated register of action, one that opposed an 'inner' indigenous traditional spiritual private sphere to an 'outer' colonial modern worldly public sphere.[18] According to Rajadhyaksha, the frontal presentation of early Indian cinema and its stress on myths of virtue and traditional values was part of the 'inner' spiritual world opposing the worldliness of modernising colonial India and therefore a sphere in which notions of an indigenous modern nationalism could develop. This even when he discusses stunt films like *Diler Jigar* which uses frontal compositions even for presenting erotic scenes.[19] Rajadhyaksha's analysis imposes the social cinema-oriented narrational interpretative scheme on genres as diverse as mythological and stunt films. All narratives are milked for their potential to reveal historical truths about nation, class, religion and gender.

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[12] The key debates in film studies are neatly summarised by Ravi Vasudevan in the introduction to Ravi Vasudevan (ed.), *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema* (Delhi, 2000).
[13] Prasad (1998), p.237.
[14] This remains the running theme in Prasad (1998).
[15] Diana Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg, 1985).
[16] Judith Mara Gutman, *Through Indian Eyes* (New York, 1982).
[17] Rajadhyaksha (1987).
[18] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Delhi, 1993).
[19] Rajadhyaksha (1995).

More literally, most conventional narratives have focused on censorship controversies or statements made by filmmakers on the allegorisation of nationalist consciousness in their films form the backbone of this narrative. The juxtaposition of the pioneers of cinema with those of the nation presents a neat and convincing narrative of the heroic growth of both institutions. Indeed, the pioneers of cinema become the pioneers of the nation.

However, such theorisation does not take into account the fact that frontality was very much part of early American cinema that was based on theatrical presentation and also in the 'cinema of attractions' as described by Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault.[20] Frontality remained extremely strong in later films such as Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse* films. Secondly, to use Phalke's cinema to characterise the entire early film production in India is problematic especially since not much of this cinema had anything to do with spiritual values. Much of this cinema dealt with adventure, romance and action. Mythological films were a secondary genre by 1921. And though it would be too early to speculate on film style in the absence of adequate footage, existing stills of films like *Sindbad the Sailor* (Imperial, 1930) show frame-compositions in line with realist framing techniques – framing in depth and a lack of camera consciousness on the part of characters portrayed.[21]

For historical narratives of the early Indian cinema with an exclusive focus on nationalism, the nationalist social cinema of the 1930s under the stewardship of the bourgeoisie becomes a convenient telos of industrial development. However, such an interpretation reads back the power of the nationalist elite over the industry into a period when such an elite was yet to assume hegemonic control and more importantly, was still largely external to the trajectory of industrial growth. Thus, except in the case of the social, a disjunction arises between the narratives of industrial growth that display generic complexities and shifts in industrial practice, and those dealing with the cultural meanings of its products interpreted along transcendental categories of nation, class, religion and gender. This is most apparent in the *Encyclopaedia* that acknowledges generic diversity and complexity of industrial practice for early Bombay cinema yet prioritises the social as its dominant mode of address. The scant notice paid by the *Encyclopaedia* to the cosmopolitan adventure-romance genre of the late 1920s is an indication of this bias, which in manifesting itself misses crucial aspects of the industry's growth, most notably the stardom of Sulochana. The run-of-the-mill 'popular' is thus edited out of historical consideration. It remains the commodified face of early Bombay cinema, incapable of being incorporated into the cultural narratives of nationalism and bourgeois modernity.

The Bombay film industry is at once an industrial-commercial complex and a cultural institution; and this goes for all its products at all times. Its cultural configurations arise out of an interplay between its commercial potential and the socio-cultural imperatives of personnel working within it. This was most starkly so in the pre-independence era when the cinema grew relatively unregulated except by market considerations. The state and the *haute* bourgeoisie played a minimal role in controlling it economically or culturally. Thus the imposition of teleologies of nationalism, bourgeois modernity or social reform impulses on this cinema is highly problematic. Indeed, the focus on the beginnings of the industry reveals it grew

[20] Tom Gunning, ' The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film: its Spectator and the Avant-Garde' in Elsaesser (1990), pp.56-62.
[21] *Indian Cinema: A Visual Voyage* (New Delhi, 1998), p.13.

through a number of shifts in its modes of cinematic address, shifts that are hardly acknowledged in narratives that posit the social as the dominant mode of film production. Even the social changed character over time, and despite fundamental similarities of themes, assumed a variety of modes of address in different historical contexts. Nor was the 'social' affect restricted strictly to social cinema. Its romantic mode, for example, affected all genres and the social itself borrowed a lot from mythological or adventure films for its affective values. Indeed, as will be seen, the meanings of the social grew in a field of contesting view points about the affect and impact of the genre. In early Bombay cinema, there was no hegemonic view of what this genre signified in terms of industrial and cinematic practice.

The monolithic reading of genres is inevitable since existing narratives of early Bombay cinema hardly ever focus on the shifts in cinematic modes of address in response to shifting audience profiles. Early Bombay cinema seems, from these accounts, a monolithic institution evolving towards the telos of the social film and its nationalist audiences of the 1930s. The sense of the industry changing its modes of address in response to multiple transformations of the *historical* context of consumption of films is largely missing. The lack of detailed industrial narratives has in turn impeded an understanding of the *history* of the cultural meanings of Bombay cinema. Genres changed shapes and meanings over time as did the cinema.

The lack of focus on the multiple historical contexts of the Bombay industry has resulted in simplistic constructions of its internal workings and the larger field of its cultural production and consumption. Most early film genres were aimed at the physical and social location of cinema in the *bazaar*. The fact that cinema grew as a disreputable *bazaar* institution through most of its early years remains unnoticed. Also unnoticed is the fact that the bourgeoisie that gained control of the industry in the mid-1930s had its antecedents in classes that resided in the *bazaar* which produced and consumed this disreputable cinema. Correspondingly, much of the industry and its audiences of the 1930s was a product of the processes by which the bourgeoisie distanced itself from the *bazaar* and its performative modes, rather than the altruism of nationalism. Although Bombay cinema's connections with the Parsi theatre and other *bazaar* performative traditions are routinely posited in recent writings on Indian cinema, such connections are frozen in timeless narratives of transfer of style or bland accounts of shift of personnel.[22] However, the fact that much of bourgeois cinema of the 1930s was in reaction to political implications of the communal configurations of *bazaar* culture has not been discussed.

More damagingly, this has led to under-theorisation about the importance of the performative in Bombay cinema and Indian society in general. Indeed, the performative remains a crude dividing line between 'popular' and 'serious' cinemas, with the former seen as performative as opposed to the literary nature of the latter. On the one hand, this reflects the general paucity of theorisation of affective values of the 'performative' in performative filmic genres. It may be argued that such oversight is the result of the generalised requirement of contemporary historical narratives to be critical of modernisation in order to be seen as progressive. Thus any evaluation of stunt cinema in terms of an analysis of the affective values of speed and physical action seems impossible since the speed and physical vigour of modernisation are the very reasons why modernisation is held in dubious light.[23] Writers who have linked

[22] See *EIC*, p.171 for entry on Parsi Theatre.
[23] For a different take on stunt cinema, see Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity* (New York, 2001).

stunt cinema and urban modernisation have at best treated such cinema as a physical symptom of modernisation (fast urban life = fast cars) or at most as spoofs on industrialisation rather than analyse the genre within the relational dynamics of the industry with specific urban social structures.[24] Added to this is the high-cultural imperative to model historical narratives around high-literary social categories of the relationship between the individual and society. Indeed, the *Encyclopaedia* differentiates the social from other genres as 'relying on the orchestration of affect at the expense of narrative propulsion', effectively denying affective value to performative cinema.[25] On the other hand, the critical stress on the social stress replicates a historical tendency of the Indian bourgeoisie to treat the performative and its performers with suspicion and hostility. However, as this thesis will argue, much of Bombay film industry and its cinema in these years was a product of its relationship with other performative media popular in Indian cities in the first half of the last century. An historical evaluation of the variety of cultural reactions to this cinema's pure performative elements is vital for an understanding of its cultural transformations in its early years.

Methods and Sources

This thesis documents the growth of the industry between 1913, when the first Indian feature film was produced in Bombay, and 1936, the year of the first classic Bombay social-realist film – *Achhut Kanya*. It was also the year when talkie production began to drop after peaking at 154 the year before. It took Bombay ten years to recover from the crisis.[26] Through the two and a half decades charted by the thesis, the industry grew from uncertain experiments by early filmmakers into a full-blown studio-based production order and then entered a phase of crucial decline. The analysis of the industry's growth will be bracketed by an analysis of the film cultures generated by Bombay cinema. Over time, Bombay cinema spread outside the confines of western India and the Presidency Towns to other regions where it spurred local film production. By 1936, Bombay cinema had become an institution encompassing a complex network of cultural and commercial exchange linking Bombay and regional film cultures.

The present analysis of early Bombay cinema takes off from received wisdom, but seeks to substantially revise existing paradigms of historiography. In doing so, it seeks to locate itself in the 'new historicism' affecting film studies, a trend that was signalled by early studies of silent cinema in various national and international contexts.[27] The classic study in this respect remains David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson's *magnum opus* on Hollywood cinema spanning the first six decades of its history. This study provided the first, systematic historical evaluation of the dynamics between industrial strategies and film style in Hollywood in terms of how it utilised its means of production, i.e. labour, technology and financing, in the context of socio-cultural discourses on cinema generated at various historical conjunctures.[28]

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[24] For a partial use of such a paradigm for analysing stunt cinema in the Indian context, see Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'The Importance of Fearless Nadia', *Times of India*, 28 Jan., 1996.
[25] *EIC*, p.219.
[26] *EIC*, p.30.
[27] Elsaesser (1990), p.3.
[28] David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York, 1885), pp.88-89..

The Bombay industry grew from a period of social opprobrium for which minimal official documentation or critical writings are available to one of relative prosperity and cultural acclaim. Hardly any archival film footage of the early years of cinema or studio records survive. Fortunately, recent historians of cinema have been able to claim: 'For certain investigations, film viewing is really an inappropriate research method.'[29] A salutary outcome of the turn towards history has been the increasing attention paid to the 'industrial' aspects of the film industry in terms of institutional growth and inter-institutional dynamics. The industrial approach also facilitates studies of cinemas which have left no filmic traces for the historian. Advertisements, magazines, publicity material and government documents can allow for fairly detailed analyses of industrial growth. Indeed, recent film histories have started to work out in detail the agenda set by Bordwell *et al.*, even for 'invisible' cinemas. Recent scholarship on the American and Chinese film industries has increasingly focused on the growth of exhibition as a major driving force in early cinema. More than the content of films, the spread of cinema is itself considered significant for the growth of the industry. In the Indian context, Stephen Hughes has studied exhibition-driven cinema in Tamil Nadu, and in Madras in particular, for the silent-cinema era.[30] The point here is that production can take an industry only so far. The growth of what an observer at the Indian Cinematograph Committe (ICC) called the 'cinema habit'[31] amongst substantial sections of a target population is a pre-requisite for the sustained development of an industry. Scholarship on the spread of cinema in small-town America stresses the importance of exhibition and formation of the cinema habit and emphasises the modes of address employed by the industry to attract attention through promotional measures and publicity for film products.[32]

The present study acknowledges the broad framework of relating industrial strategy to film style delineated by Bordwell *et al.* with certain caveats. A recent critique of the revisionist focus on industrial strategies and stylistic norms has stressed that such studies miss out on film cultures that are no longer functional by focusing overtly on the normative.[33] Indeed the critique might be extended by acknowledging that such approaches miss out on film culture altogether by emphasising the internal activities of the industry and the form of filmic products at the expense of the social meanings of cinema. The cultural profile of audiences and the media apparatus that are the interface between cinema and its socio-historical context remain largely outside the purview of such studies. Moreover, for the historian of early film industries that have left behind little visual- or industrial-archival material, the focus on film culture becomes a necessity since advertisements, magazines, film booklets, stills, biographies and government documentation are all that remain. These documents, when contextualised against the social-historical trends informing the growth of cinema, dovetail well with the industrial approach to provide a wealth of

[29] Douglas Gomery and Charles Allen, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York, 1987), p.38.
[30] Stephen P Hughes, 'Pre-Phalke Era in South India: Reflections on the Formation of Film Audiences in Madras', *South Indian Studies*, v.2, July-Dec., 1996.
[31] *Indian Cinematograph Committee Evidence*, v. IV, p.118. Henceforth *ICCE*.
[32] The agenda for the study of an exhibition-driven cinema was set in Elsaesser (1990). Subsequently, the approach formed the backbone of a five-volume study of early American cinema by Charles Musser, Eileen Bowser, Richard Koszarski, Donald Crafton and Tino Balio (see bibliography). A similar study for the French context is Richard Abel, *The Cine Goes to Town* (Berkeley, 1994). Recent scholarship on film audiences for early cinema includes studies of neighbourhood cinemas and modes of film publicity. See Kathryn Helgesen Fuller, *At the Picture Show* (Washington, 1996). For an overview, see Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes (eds.), *Early Film Audiences* (London, 1999).
[33] Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Harvard, 1996), p.88.

information about the cultures of the cinema habit. Indeed, a recent collection of essays on Shanghai's film culture focuses almost exclusively on such published material due to a similar absence of films and industrial records. This approach has necessitated a move towards studying cinema as a cultural institution with respect to urban transformations of the early twentieth century.[34]

This does not detract from the necessity of studying film style and industrial strategy together; general information about style and industrial strategy, for example on generic transformations and the growth of the star and studio order, may be gleaned from such sources as well. Depending on the focus of historical analyses, such information can be used to reconstruct useful portraits of early film cultures. By posing discourses generated by cinema in various socio-cultural contexts as valid sources for film history, an attempt is made to make possible histories of 'invisible' film cultures (the methodological stress on film watching and exhaustive industrial archives tends to paralyse such attempts) as well as nuance earlier understandings of film history.

The documentation of the growth of the industry in the thesis utilises a variety of archival materials including newspaper advertisements, film magazines, government records, and filmographies, biographies and studio histories. Indeed, the focus on exhibition-driven cinema in the early decades of the industry's growth has forced the narrative to begin from 1896 – the first year of film exhibition in Bombay. The early film pioneers were not only makers of films but also those who sold films and provided sites for their consumption. Over time, many of the latter went on to swell the ranks of the former, creating vital economic and cultural links between the multiple facets of the industry. Newspaper advertisements provide continuous information about the growth of exhibition and production, and when supplemented with published historical material and governmental records, allow for a sustained historical narrative of the industry's growth in terms of the dynamics between exhibition and production. Thus the primary trajectory of the thesis is a documentation of the growth of the industry and the corresponding cinema habit in empirical detail and by putting together for the first time a coherent narrative of the growth of the Bombay industry and the film cultures it generated.

The narrative of industrial growth and development of the cinema habit raises crucial questions about the cultural dynamics of their interrelated trajectories. The production and exhibition patterns reflected in the sources indicate a number of shifts in the cultural meaning of the institution of cinema over the two decades and a half of the industry's history under consideration. Put briefly, in this period the industry was preoccupied with garnering respectability and bourgeois acclaim while growing into a commercially popular cultural institution. However, the ways in which the industry chose to balance popularity and critical acclaim were manifold, changing in response to stimuli both from within the industry and outside. Thus, interwoven into the narrative of the growth of the industry and the cinema habit is another story – one of strategies employed by the industry to endear itself to the cultural *czar*s of the subcontinent.

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[34] For an interesting set of essays connecting cinema with early twentieth century urban culture, see Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwarz (eds.), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley, 1995). Essays on Shanghai film culture are collected in Yingjin Zhang (ed.), *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943* (Stanford, 1999). For a synoptic study of film culture of early cinema, see Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception* (Chicago, 1994).

The varying configurations of a genre depended in turn on its projected market potential and the imperatives of producers and filmmakers. Conventional narratives of early Bombay cinema have seldom paid attention to the audience configurations targeted by the industry's cinematic modes of address. 'Modes of address' may be defined as the implicit and explicit ways in which aspects of the style, structure and/or content of a text function to 'position' readers as subjects ('ideal readers') (e.g. in relation to class, age, gender and ethnicity).[35] Thus the Bombay cinema grew through a series of shifts in modes of address relative to shifts in the audience configurations to which it appealed. Not only did class, gender and religiosity play important roles in the transformation of its production, but over time, Bombay absorbed regional cinematic impulses arising in various parts of north India. Finally, the shifts in audience configuration affected the composition of the industry as personnel from regions captivated by cinema entered the industry and took charge of production. This set up multiple fields of tension between plural points of view on the social purposes of the cinematic institution which in turn affected how genres were produced and seen.

The two narratives – of the growth of the industry and of its quest for respectability – are interrelated. The economic expansion of the industry underlay the growth of cultural discourses about cinema that in turn affected the trajectories of economic expansion. If there is one running theme that provides an overall focus for the thesis, it is that of the growing complexity of the workings of the industry as it expanded beyond its local focus. In doing so, the industry generated a web of interlinked institutions alongside its production practices, most notably the development of a complex distribution-exhibition nexus and the growth of critical media as a result of and in response to changes in audience configurations. Thus the thesis seeks to delineate the growth of the industry not so much in terms of analyses of film content but by reconstructing the relational dynamics between its organisational frameworks that made certain modes of cinematic address *possible* at particular historical conjunctures. This approach takes for granted that at any given point in a cultural institution's history there are multiple modes of address battling it out for a place in the sun. The formal qualities of any mode are in themselves not a sufficient condition for its success. Conditions for success have to be created through the complex interplay between various economic and cultural institutions which the mode of address is part of. Thus, over time, the Bombay industry had to adjust production strategies like genre and stardom to increasingly complex market requirements which in turn substantially revised the cultural politics within the industry, a process reflected in shifts in recruitment patterns and the industry's relationship with the critical media.

Despite the lack of actual visual footage of early Bombay cinema, a wealth of material, especially publicity ephemera, film magazines and the evidence presented at the ICC helps retell the story of Bombay cinema and its cultural universe. For the period between 1921 and 1931, the main years of silent cinema production, the publicity material from newspapers and the ICC evidence are the primary sources for the reconstruction of the industry's generic production schedules and internal dynamics and corresponding audience configurations to delineate the modes of address employed by the industry to woo its audiences. In the early years, film publicity was an elaborate affair, providing a wealth of information about plots, genre, stars and the audiences addressed. This was because the industry first had to establish

[35] Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics for Beginners*, http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/

itself as a respectable cultural institution by becoming popular, that is 'visible' enough to become commonsensical for the urban Indian. Only then could cultural elaboration follow. In some ways then, this cinema was a publicity-driven cinema. Thus the analysis of advertisements allows a substantial reconstruction of Bombay film culture in these years. The cultural discourse about cinema is itself a source of vital information about the content of the cinema and the workings of the industry.

When such information is contextualised in the light of the evidence about similar topics presented at the ICC and published details about films, studios and personnel as well as oral interviews with personnel, a fairly comprehensive picture of the relational dynamics between the internal workings of the industry, transformation of audience profiles and film production emerges. The ICC provides vital evidence for the thesis that the economics and the culture of the industry were historically inseparable by providing a wealth of empirical detail about film production, studio histories, audiences and the industry's relationship with neighbouring artistic genres Appearing as it did at a crucial point in the industry's history when a new generation of filmmakers and audiences were taking charge of Bombay film culture and striving to forge new definitions of industrial respectability, it remains the only source for reconstructing the imperatives of the studio personnel and audiences at a moment of change. These can then be corroborated from newspaper advertisements and film magazines that appeared in the following period as well as from published material about the industry.

The coming of the talkies signals a substantial improvement in the resources available for a reconstruction of industrial growth. Film magazines and extended newspaper coverage of films help reconstruct the cinematic modes of address aimed at by studios at the crucial historical conjuncture of the shift to talkies. Details about recruitment of personnel, the industry's relationship with literature, theatre, dance and music, investment in technology and film reviews add up to provide a comprehensive evaluation of film production and its socio-cultural contexts. Thus they replace the ICC evidence in conveying in rich historical detail a composite picture of the rapid growth of the industry as it strove to expand markets and make itself respectable in newer ways.

The magazines themselves are a symptom of the growing interest of the educated classes in the industry, something that was crucially missing in the 1920s. As film-watching grew more complex, film reviews began to offer a clear picture of contestatory viewpoints on the social meaning of the cinematic institution. When seen in the light of published material about studios, stars and films, interviews and, in the case of the talkies, footage from some of the films, they help delineate how considerations of class, gender, religiosity and regionality drove the economics of the industry. Genre and stardom were products of the complex interplay of economic and cultural factors configured through the dialogue between industry and audience. Indeed, the social, the nation and its filmmakers emerged out of a contestatory cultural field arising due to the players' relative access to the industry's economic infrastructure.

It needs to be emphasised that the growth of the industry through shifts in its mode of address was part of larger socio-cultural transformations. Thus the narrative of industrial growth and its cultural dynamics is juxtaposed with contextual social historical narratives about urban transformation, regional cultural dynamics and transformations of the world of art and culture. These include a variety of resources,

consisting in the main of governmental archival material and published documentation of social-historical changes in the period under consideration. Care has been taken to keep such narratives as close as possible to the history of industrial development by focusing on biographies and histories of cultural institutions and personnel directly involved with the Bombay cinema.

A number of caveat need to be placed in the context of the cultural focus of the thesis for the silent era. The analysis of the industry is almost exclusively focused on the activities of Gujarati-speaking filmmakers based in Bombay and their films. Although Marathi cinema formed an important part of Bombay film culture, including many early hits such as *Kalyan Khajina*, *Netaji Palkar* and *Poona Raided*, almost all of it was produced in Nasik and Kolhapur. Yet this output formed a minuscule portion of films shown in Bombay and elsewhere. The bulk of Bombay cinema was overwhelmingly aimed at the non-Marathi-speaking public as was apparent from the fact that film intertitles and booklets were almost exclusively in Gujarati, Urdu, Hindi and English. Also, for want of adequate resources, the thesis does not account for the thriving film production in Burma that maintained a close link with the Bombay industry.

Plan of Chapters

Chapter One describes the growth of early film exhibition in Bombay and the ingress of early Bombay cinema into cinema halls that hitherto showed only imported films. The growth of the exhibition trade is discussed in the context of the growth of the city which helps map shifts in exhibition practice *vis-à-vis* changing audience configurations. A discussion of the growth of publicity mechanisms, including the placing of cinema halls to attract particular kinds of audiences, buttresses the analysis of Bombay film culture between 1896 and 1921. These developments culminated in the establishment of the first studios producing Bombay films around 1921.

Chapter Two takes up an analysis of the development of genres and the star system between 1921 and 1928. The growth of genres reflected the development of the industry in physical terms as well as in terms of an increasingly complex system of address to meet equally complex and variegated audience configurations. By the mid-1920s, the studios were beginning to develop and manipulate a star order in tandem with generic experimentation to evolve modes of address aimed at particular sections of the audience.

Chapter Three takes up the implications of studio strategies discussed in the last chapter for industrial organisation. 1925 marks a crucial date in the history of the industry when the older studio order was replaced by a new one that reflected the industry's changed cultural imperatives. Class as reflected in the composition of personnel of the industry was a crucial factor affecting production strategies and studio profiles. This shift was reflected in the proceedings of the ICC where various viewpoints about the industry's future were presented to the colonial state, a discussion of which allows a contextualisation of the realignment of production and organisational strategies around 1925.

The discourse of class was expressed mainly through discussions about technological improvement and amelioration of work conditions in the industry. Central to the discourses of technology and rights of industrial workers was the practical need to create a cosmopolitan star imagery through narratives of modernisation. This was to be undertaken by a new generation of personnel, well-

versed in the ways of modern technology and techniques. Bombay cinema *circa*1928 symbolised the technological transformation of both industry and city.

Chapter Four analyses the expansion of the Bombay industry into north India and its growing entanglement with film cultures in Punjab, Bengal and Maharashtra. This forms a crucial watershed in the history of the Bombay industry as it struck creative financial and cultural relationships with other film cultures and changed its production, recruitment and exhibition strategies considerably. Bombay film culture had become a transregional one. This transregional character was further intensified with the shift to talkies that necessitated a sharing of markets and personnel with other film cultures.

Chapter Five provides the cultural context for post-1925 film production in Bombay through a discussion of film culture in north Indian towns and cities. In combat were two opposed and overlapping cinematic modes of address – the cosmopolitan *bazaar* cinema with its Islamicate imagery and narratives of adventure and romance and the nascent bourgeois cinema based on literary realism which stressed social and national reform *via* Anthony Smith has recently called an ethnoscape based on notions of a glorious Hindu past. Discussions of these contrasting styles of cinema are contextualised against the urban transformation in north India in the 1930s and shifts in audience configurations for Bombay cinema as it increasingly became transregional. The division between *bazaar* and bourgeois cinema was further intensified with the arrival of the talkies.

The last chapter unpacks the distinctions between *bazaar* and bourgeois cinema through an analysis of the discourses generated in the rapidly-proliferating media with the advent of the talkies. Considerations of class, gender and religion played out in the arena of media discourse and the politics of exhibition ultimately led to the subordination of the *bazaar* cinema to bourgeois cinema. The end result was the emergence of a hybrid cinema that mixed *bazaar* cinema styles with the 'monumental style' of bourgeois cinema that started Bombay cinema's long march towards the establishment of the Hindu ethnoscape.

More importantly, shifts in cinematic hierarchies affected the organisation of the industry. The Hindu ethnoscapic cinema with its monumental style was a specific cinematic mode of address that sought to edge out its rivals in the market as well as the cultural institutions informing *bazaar* cinema. Bombay cinema *circa* 1936, was firmly in the hands of varying shades of 'respectable' studios who appropriated elements of *bazaar* cinema for their purposes and laid the foundations of an elite popular cinema, an institution that was to last until the 1970s.

Prologue

Following the Plague of 1896, Bombay underwent a fundamental structural transformation. From the period around the Royal Visit in 1911, the Corporation and the Improvement Trust went on a drive to clean up the city and align urban spaces into well-connected networks. Bombay was until then a city made up of three separate zones separated by wide open spaces and water bodies. The panic created by disease and overcrowding in a period of great political uncertainty convinced the colonial government and the city elite of the need to revamp urban spaces in order to make them safer and more governable. Through the early decades of the twentieth century Bombay grew from a cluster of discrete localities into an industrial megalopolis. By the 1930s, the city had spread northwards to include many villages.[1] The transportation revolution of the 1920s, that saw suburban rail facilities, buses, trams and motorcars take over the city, contributed substantially to the urban explosion.

It needs to be emphasised that the urban revolution in Bombay created vast economic and cultural chasms between sections of the populace. Yet the tremendous transformation of the city could not have happened without the forging of a composite urban chessboard which set the rules, aspirations and dynamics for the city to grow, albeit in very confusing ways. The rules were negotiated many times over and, in many ways, the city was a result of the push and pull between urban growth and notions of citizenship. The cinema was one such site of negotiation. Over time, it would seem more durable a resident of Bombay than many of its other denizens.

The First World War changed every aspect of urban life in Bombay. Geared towards a war-time economy, Bombay rapidly became the port in charge of handling the passage of men and goods from all parts of the subcontinent towards the front. It became a military city with soldiers and sailors continuously garrisoned there for long periods. The cinema business grew as a result of the presence of soldiery in the city.[2] Not only did business expand in the city, the boom in trade carried films into hinterland towns like Ahmednagar as well.[3] Industrial production and retail business were stepped up to provide for the extraordinary circumstances of the war. On the political front, the colonial government took the first serious steps towards devolution of power to Indians as part of wooing support for the war-effort. Control of civic facilities was passed on to a new brand of young politician-activists who formed the core of the future nationalist movement.[4] The changes went beyond the economic and political sectors. When the war ended, the city was characterised by its cosmopolitanism, with the Westernised educated young spearheading the growth of urban culture and setting the dominant paradigm for cultural mobility.[5] With 'the use of electric light and power' becoming 'more universal' Bombay was well on the way

[1] *Proceedings of the General Department – Local Self-Government*, Government of Bombay, 1919, p.93. Henceforth *BLSGP*. A notice about the extension of the Bombay Town Planning Act, 1915 to the suburbs proposed the development of Worli Village once lines of road in Mahim had been laid out. The notice also referred to the development of Borivli and Santa Cruz.
[2] Interview with Homi Wadia.
[3] *ICCE*, v. I, p.291.
[4] For the development of civic politics in Bombay during the World War and after, see Sandeep Hazareesingh, 'The Quest for Urban Citizenship: Civic Rights, Public Opinion, and Colonial Resistance in Early Twentieth-Century Bombay', *Modern Asian Studies*, v.34, no.4, Oct. 2000. Henceforth *MAS*.
[5] Interview with Homi Wadia.

to becoming a modern metropolis.[6] The city changed from one built of mud, stone and wood to concrete, the building material 'pre-eminently suitable for Bombay'.[7]

Offices, colleges, shared public spaces and political activity provided the stage for the invention of a middle-class urban ethos in 1920s Bombay. The 1931 Census noted a rise in the number of cashiers, accountants, clerks and other office employees, warehouses and shops. Municipal workers contributed a large share to this rise. The number of professionals and those involved with the liberal arts rose as well.[8] A combination of governance, market forces and aspirations for civic rights brought various sections together to work towards similar goals. Although various strata of society stood at different distances from their aims, aspirations like jobs, marriage, health, education and leisure were converted into cultural tropes capable of being narrativised and consumed by all classes. Indeed, the decade saw an explosion of such narratives. They reflected the changed nature of middle-class aspirations in this period, themselves marked by profound ambiguities towards reform and urbanisation. These aspirations were caught and recorded in the burgeoning culture industry of the city.

A notable change in these decades was the shift towards a younger demographic profile. The Census of 1931 indicated a swelling in the ranks of the age-group fifteen and fifty in Bombay, leading to a lower average age. It reported, 'Bombay city is becoming a place where the wage-earners are being drawn increasingly from the younger age-groups.'[9] As younger people poured in searching for education, business and jobs, Bombay's socio-cultural life was transformed. University co-education, political and social activities and the transformed nature of urban public spaces increased the scope for encounters between the sexes. 'The complete free and open intercourse between the men and women students at the Medical College especially struck me', wrote a directress at the Missionary Settlement for University Women in 1923.[10] An observer, commenting on the vogue for romantic films amongst the young, especially for those coming from America, felt that such 'demoralising effects on the country are due to new conditions which films bring to the fore.' Amongst such new conditions was love-marriage, 'not known earlier'.[11] The new generation discovered sexual love and companionate marriage; modes of inter-sexual behaviour were changing. 'Even Indians are dancing now', observed the Chairman of the Indian Cinematograph Committee in 1927.[12] The social satirists of the day bemoaned the fact that the young men were taking to hotels, tea, lemonade, biscuits, snacks, liquor and cigarettes in addition to imitating Western dress and social behaviour.[13] Texts on eugenics decried the feminine fashion for smoking, sleeveless blouses, jewellery, skirts and dancing for producing 'animal magnetic currents'.[14] It was this generation, placed between the contradictory pulls of the traditional and the modern, that took over Bombay's cultural world and produced the first generation of the film industry's personnel.

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[6] *Proceedings of the Public Works Department*, Government of Bombay, 1923, p.6. Henceforth *BPPWD*.
[7] *Proceedings of the Development Department*, Government of Bombay, 1922, p.45.
[8] *Census of India*, 1931, v. IX, p.44. Henceforth *CI*.
[9] *CI*, 1931, v. IX, p.35.
[10] *Annual Report of the Missionary Settlement for University Women*, 1922-1923, pp.2-3.
[11] *ICCE*, v. II, p.139.
[12] *ICCE*, v. I, p.149.
[13] For example, Lalshankar Ishwarbhai Trivedi, *Pravin Vilasi* (Bombay, 1918).
[14] BS Banaji, *Strinon Madadgar Faresto* (Bombay, 1927).

Through the 1920s, the power of the media expanded dramatically. Literacy rose substantially and this included literacies of various kinds. The 1931 Census reported that the number of people engaged in Letters, Arts and Sciences was on the rise: 'It is likely that the number of editors, authors and persons employed in connection with newspapers has grown and that cinema players and dramatic companies are responsible for some increase in the population. Bombay city is a local for the production of Indian film.'[15] The print explosion significantly changed urban experience. Various worlds collided in the pages of the newspapers and literature that proliferated in multifarious forms. Novels, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers, songbooks and chapbooks jostled together in this dramatically expanded print space.[16] The increased use of photography was a significant development in this period. Print and the visual media instilled in the readers and viewers certain attitudes towards consumption. The decade saw an enormous influx of branded goods into the market. As advertising rates in newspapers and public spaces came down, the volume of advertisements for medicines, cigarettes, foodstuffs, health accessories and leisure items in newspapers and on street skysigns and hoardings rose dramatically.[17]

The decade increasingly saw the invention of leisure for large sections of the population. As salaried employment and the bureaucratic work ethic in offices became the norm of urban life, the division between work and leisure became more pronounced. Various forms of cultural performance interacted under the aegis of urban culture forming a hyperinteractive arabesque of public spectacles. People ate at the Cinema Restaurant, frequented plays, betted at the races, watched cricket matches and films. After eating at the Irani restaurant they could pick up a handbill for the latest film or play from the manager's counter, get back to work and catch a film-show on the way home. Beer was becoming the favoured alcoholic drink amongst the middle classes and certain sections of the working classes.[18] Tea-shops proliferated all over the city at a rate that sometimes alarmed the colonial officals.[19] In 1918, the government added *bidi* leaves and cinematograph films to the list of taxable goods in Schdedule M of the Bombay Municipal Act, 1888.[20] By the 1920s, the government was taxing entertainment and raising loans from the Turf Club for road repairs.[21] Alongside the modern spectacle was the world of religious festivities divided into a government-sanctioned annual cycle of 52 events with their fairs and processions[22] and the daily ritual cycle in the temples of Bhuleshwar and in *dargahs* strewn across the city.

Reading too could be tailored to this multifaceted world of entertainment. Opening the *Bombay Chronicle*, readers could check advertisements for films or choose the best guide to betting at the races from the versions advertised on the same page. They could pick up a sensational detective novel, a genre which had just begun

[15] *CI*, 1931, v. IX, p.51.
[16] In 1930, 314 newspapers were circulating in the Bombay Presidency. 92 newspapers were started and 62 went out of circulation. *Report on the Administration of the Presidency*, 1929-30, p.239. Henceforth *RAP*. In 1928-29, 88 million newspaper packets were handled by the Indian Post and Telegraph department. LF Rushbrook Williams, *India in 1928-29* (Delhi, 1985), p.162.
[17] *Proceedings of the Legislative Department*, Government of Bombay, 1921, p.116. Henceforth *BLP*.
[18] *Report on the Administration of the Excise Department in the Bombay Presidency*, 1928-29, p.9. It reported that, 'the increase in the sales of fermented liquors is attributed to the growing taste for beer among the working classes, in preference to stronger beverages.'
[19] *Proceedings of the Home Department*, Government of Bombay, 1924, p.351.
[20] *BLP*, 1918, p.419.
[21] *BLSGP*, 1923, p.1625.
[22] Interview with M Syed.

to proliferate in Bombay, or better still, follow the latest murder case equally sensationally reported by the *Bombay Chronicle* or *Mumbai Samachar*. The more serious reader could subscribe to a journal like *Vismi Sadi*, read the latest social novel by Kanhaiyalal Munshi or read critical essays in the newspaper by his Girgaum Back Road neighbour Indulal Yajnik[23] – new stars on the horizon of modern Gujarati literature and politics.

The 1920s were defined by momentous change. People changed names, dress codes, sexual codes and habitat. The city looked different. Gone were the hats and turbans which defined distinctive communal identities. Gone were the buildings which defined a particular way of life. People increasingly spoke a homogeneous urban lingo. A certain amount of levelling took place in the cultural and social life. Civic pressure cut out open displays of conspicuous consumption. An advertisement for health food went: 'The Rajah and his subjects find in Horlicks ideal food drink'.[24] Kings and subjects, queens and lady-teachers began to dress alike. Palaces became oversized villas or bungalows while the interiors of private residences were modelled on the *sahib*'s residence. Consumption, pursuit of culture and mass entertainment spectacles contributed to a general sense of a shared urban civic life. The congruence of lifestyles of the classes was repeatedly emphasised in the media – in the texts, photographs and films of the time. It was this transforming world that set the pace for early Bombay cinema.

[23] Information from *The Times of India Directory*. Henceforth *TOID*.
[24] *Bombay Chronicle*, Jun.25, 1918. Henceforth *BC*.

Chapter One

The Bombay Cinema: The Silent Film Era, 1913-1928

The cinema was first seen in December 1896 in Paris. Its exhibition triggered off an expansive global race to corner markets around the world. The agents of the Lumiere Brothers brought Bombay's first cinematograph show to Watson's Hotel, at the junction of the Fort and Colaba. Cinema made its debut in Bombay on 7 July, 1897,[1] and soon became a regular feature of the city's landscape**.**

Early film culture in the city depended more on exhibition of films than on their production. The expansion of film exhibition and the growth of early film spectatorship created the economic and cultural backdrop for subsequent developments. If the myth is to be believed, the foundation of the Bombay film industry was a fortuitous one, arising entirely from the passing thoughts of a talented inventor-draughtsman while watching an imported film. Another myth has it that the industry came into being due to the commercial success of one mythological film made by the same pioneer.[2]

This chapter examines the growth of cinema exhibition and production in Bombay between 1913 and 1928. These years were critical for the firm establishment of the industry in the city and a tentative reaching out towards supra-local markets. Initially, Bombay films had to find their way into existing cinema halls which were exclusively devoted to imported films. The process was a slow one. It was not until 1925 that Bombay cinema finally came of age, and that too only economically.

Between 1921 and 1925, a number of Gujarati entrepreneurs and artists came together to give shape to the industry. Almost entirely based in Bombay and entirely reliant on local capital, it had to compete with an increasingly globalised market of imported films. The early audiences that fuelled the industry had to be generated from within the city's population. The market in Bombay had been primed by imported films from Europe and America. The intersection of this local market for films with global forms of capitalistic film production provided the site from which the Bombay industry took off. Filmmakers now had to cultivate a taste for the indigenous fare they were providing in order to win audiences.

To understand the processes by which this was achieved, it is necessary to focus not only on the numbers of cinema halls built and films produced, but also on the social context for the consumption of films. Cinema formed an integral part of the trajectories of Bombay's urbanisation. It grew with the city. The location of cinema halls and the modes of advertising they employed were significant in establishing Bombay cinema as a powerful cultural institution. These factors were pivotal in the establishment of a cinema habit in the city, a habit that could sustain film production in the long term.

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[1] A Rajadhyaksha and P Willemen (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* (2nd edition, Delhi, 1999), p.17. Henceforth *EIC*.

[2] The stories refer to the career of DG Phalke, the acknowledged father of Indian cinema who was inspired to make films while watching '*The Life of Christ*' at the American-India Cinematograph on Sandhurst Road in 1910. BV Dharap, 'The Phalke Saga' in Firoze Rangoonwalla (ed.), *Phalke Centenary Souvenir* (Bombay, 1978), p.51. His aim of making *swadeshi* films reflecting Indian life and culture was realised when he completed the first Indian feature *Raja Harishchandra* in 1913. The success of his 1917 feature *Lanka Dahan* is said to have convinced exhibitors and other filmmakers alike of the viability of making indigenous films. Reports have it that the takings from the film in Madras had to be loaded on bullock-carts. Dharap (1978), p.59.

The growth of film production and spectatorship changed the very nature of the industry. The Bombay cinema was transformed from an exhibition-driven enterprise to a production-oriented industry. This change was signalled by the establishment of full-fledged studios by 1925, characterised by production schedules handling simultaneous production of multiple films, incipient distribution networks and the star system. The final section of the chapter will focus on these developments as Bombay cinema stepped into a new era of growth and expansion.

From the Cinematograph to Cinema, 1900-1918

The period from 1900 to 1918 was the era of the cinematograph performance rather than the cinema. The mobile machine-generated performance was licensed, not the site of exhibition. At any point, the government could revoke permission, the tents would be pulled down and the show forced to move. Yet the performance was centred around a machine that guaranteed performance. Despite the ephemeral nature of the performance, the word cinematograph retained the sense of being a gritty technology-oriented institution, not easily shifted, rooting its audiences around what it projected on the screen. The term 'cinematograph' therefore denoted the entire institution of film exhibition encompassing the machine, the films shown, the site of exhibition, the commercial company owning the machine as well as the audience. The semi-permanent tent-show companies occupied the cusp of the transforming context of film-exhibition, between peripatetic shows and more permanent cinema halls – ephemeral yet stable. Even when cinema halls replaced tent shows, the new halls continued to be called cinematographs for several years.

At first, films were shown in tents and extant theatre halls or buildings. A series of cinematograph machines made their way into Bombay and were given short runs in various locations in the city. On 18 September, 1897, Clifton and Company, leading photographers of Bombay, gave a demonstration of Hughes' Photo-mutoscope at their atelier at 58 Medow's Street in the Fort area. Two shows were given and the admission was set at rupee one.[3] The same model was again demonstrated a month later at Goculdas Tejpal School.[4] The same month, another series of shows was held at the Novelty Theatre, this time sponsored by the leading dealers in musical instruments, Soundy and Company (who later ran an ice-skating rink on the Esplanade).[5] By 1901, locations like the Gaiety and Novelty theatres and the Framjee Cowasjee Institute at Dhobi Talao (later the site of Wellington cinema), held cinematograph shows. Meanwhile, a huge public following seems to have been developing. A film of Queen Victoria's funeral procession shown at Gaiety and Novelty, was repeated on public demand. The manager of Novelty advertised a repeat showing of the film saying 'Last Friday's Performance was over-crowded. Hundreds of spectators, both European and Native, went back disappointed'.[6] The Framjee Cowasjee Institute showed *The Passion Play* that was advertised as 'A Wonderful and Magnificent Production of a touching drama on the Life of Christ'. The manager emphasised the special quality of his shows by reiterating that 'This play has never been shown in India, and has been imported at an enormous expense'.[7]

[3] *Times Of India*, 16 Sept., 1897. Henceforth *TOI*.
[4] *TOI*, 9 Oct., 1897.
[5] *TOI*, 20 Oct., 1897.
[6] *TOI*, 23 Aug., 1901.
[7] *TOI*, 2 Oct., 1901.

By the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, regular cinematograph shows were being held seasonally, usually starting from around Christmas and carrying on through the winter. The Paris Cinematograph under the management of Paris-India Motor Car Company held shows at the Esplanade. 'A Grand Show of New and the most Entertaining Pictures ever displayed', ran their advertisement.[8] The Excelsior Cinematograph was another such company that held shows at the Maidan in a 'Fairy Pavilion fitted with Electric Fans and grand display of Electric Lights'.[9] The Framjee Cowasjee hall continued its shows and seems to have added a variety format. For example, Miss Elle Davis sang the 'latest illustrated songs' in tandem with 'new and interesting pictures'.[10]

From 1908 onwards, companies like the Excelsior Cinematograph and American-India Cinematograph held regular seasonal shows at the Maidan. These companies were the first commercial exhibitors to take up the cinema business in its own right. Their shows were regularised and the companies entered an informal understanding with the Public Works Department that their licenses would be renewed every year. The shows were extensively advertised, became more elaborate and the sites took on an air of permanence as they were made more comfortable and attractive. The American-India Cinematograph's Diorama shows were held 'in a beautiful Shamiana fitted with electric lights and fans'.[11] Its first diorama programme consisted of two films, one, 350 feet long, featuring a trick donkey, a boxing horse, performing elephants and a singing donkey; and another, 500 feet long, showing fire rescue scenes.[12] Over the next few years a cinema habit was established in Bombay as these companies held more and more elaborate shows at the Maidan. By 1909, the Excelsior company could announce: 'See You at the Excelsior – The Recognised Rendezvous for Bombay'.[13] From 1908 onwards, the show season began in October rather than December, synchronising the cinema season with the Indian festival calendar, an indication of the growing enthusiasm for the new medium amongst Indians. This was only to be expected considering that both the Excelsior and American-India companies were owned by Parsis – the Excelsior by the Bilimorias and the American-India by PB Mehta. The Paris-India Bioscope Company, held in joint-proprietorship by Jacob Grob and Anna Stanger, was in trouble by 1909 when Grob, a resident of the Railway Hotel on Grant Road, was declared insolvent.[14] Local entrepreneurs were taking over from the early European businessmen. As will be seen below, they were laying the foundations of the Bombay film industry.

Films could also be seen at the Mahim fair, an annual event drawing thousands of people on the occasion of the *urs* of the *pir* to whom the Mahim *dargah* was dedicated.[15] There are references to travelling showmen from Northern India, who visited the city hopeful of business.[16] The earliest example of the peripatetic showman was P Michael, manager of The Cinematograph Exhibition Company, who exhibited

[8] *TOI*, 21 Dec., 1906.
[9] *TOI*, 25 Nov., 1907.
[10] *TOI*, 14 Nov., 1907.
[11] *TOI*, 5 Oct., 1908.
[12] *TOI*, 21 Oct., 1908.
[13] *TOI*, 27 Oct., 1909.
[14] *BGG*, 1909, p.682.
[15] *Annual Report of the Police of the Town and Island of Bombay*, 1910, p.13. Henceforth *ARBP*.
[16] The Bombay Government Gazette refers to a undelivered telegram for Ussiff Alli of the Royal Bioscope, Lucknow. *BGG*, Pt.II, 1907, p.1859.

at the Gaiety Theatre[17] and the Framjee Cowasjee Hall.[18] These showmen had their own machines and moved all over the subcontinent giving exhibitions in various cities. The Mutoscope and Biograph Company of India was registered on 15 May, 1899 in England as part of the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company Limited touring India.[19]

In 1910, the Government of Bombay decided to phase out tent-shows in the Maidan amid growing worries about fire hazards posed by cinematograph exhibitions in the "flimsy erections which have been in evidence on the 'Maidan'".[20] When Maurice Bandmann, the greatest showman east of the Mediterranean, was asked to move his show from the Maidan in 1909, he was informed that 'the maidan is now used for tent shows that look very disreputable' and that the government would not object to 'bona fide cricket pavilions being pitched, but that they should be smart and clean in appearance.'[21] Already the mass amusement spectacle of cinema was being separated from more genteel spectacles like cricket matches. Shows continued on the grounds between the Police Court and the Municipality Office Building for a few more years; but for all practical purposes their days were over.[22] However, fairs and fetes continued with tent-shows while peripatetic showmen held performances at theatres. From 1910, exhibition companies were obliged to make arrangements for more permanent exhibition spaces. That year, the task of licensing theatres and granting performance licenses was transferred to the Arms and Motor Vehicles Department of the Bombay Police.[23] The tents were pulled down and the proprietors informed that licenses would be refused unless they constructed substantial fire-proof buildings. By 1914, most of the companies had shifted to halls made of sheets of corrugated iron with external operating cabins of brick and cement.[24]

In 1913, the Commissioner of Police noted that 'the popularity of the cinemas has not waned may be gathered from the fact that during the year four new cinema theatres have been erected.'[25] The shift in terminology from 'cinematograph' to 'cinema theatre' was significant, lending an air of permanence to the performances. The word 'theatre' connected the cinema to the more prestigious bourgeois form of entertainment – the theatrical performance. To back up the drive towards standardisation and containment of the cinematic performance based on the model of the theatrical performance, the Police Department introduced, in 1914, annual inspections of the halls by Improvement Trust engineers, telephone authorities and the theatre licensing department.

The increasing popularity of cinema made it necessary for colonial officials to control and order its expansion. Fire and health hazards were the starting point of the reformation of film exhibition and spectatorship, but as in the case of the streets, houses and neighbourhoods, the main aim was to control over-crowding and to order

[17] *TOI*, 16 Aug., 1901.
[18] *TOI*, 2 Oct., 1901.
[19] Richard Brown and Barry Anthony, *A Victorian Film Enterprise: The History of the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company, 1897-1915* (Trowbridge, 1999), p.116
[20] *BJP*, 1909, p.2203.
[21] *BPPWD*, 1909, p.4.
[22] *BPPWD*, 1910, p.10-11. The Excelsior Cinematograph Company, which had until 1910 held tent-shows in the Maidan, applied for a plot of land 'between Esplanade Court and Municipal Offices and at the north west corner of Waudby Road'.
[23] *ARBP*, 1910, p.13.
[24] *ARBP*, 1913, p.13.
[25] *ARBP*, 1913, p.13.

the masses that were pouring into the city and the cinema halls. The 1910s saw the recurrence of plague. In 1918, the city was hit by one of the worst influenza epidemics. Exhibitors responded to the onslaught of audiences by rapidly dismantling corrugated iron shacks and converting exhibition sites into more permanent buildings. By 1916, cinema halls were calling themselves 'picture palaces'. The Palladium, opened in 1914, was advertised as 'a Picture and Variety Palace'.[26] 'The 'picture palace' has come to stay. The supply has not yet come up to the demand', commented the Police Commissioner in his annual report for 1916.[27]

In 1918, the Indian Cinematograph Act was passed which made it necessary for cinema-hall builders to get plans for the hall approved by the Public Works Department before embarking on construction. The Act also made censorship of films a necessary condition of exhibition. The war had made the government aware of the important role cinema would play in future propaganda. This alerted them to the need to control a medium which was fast becoming a mass entertainment form. Moreover, times of internal and external unrest loomed on the horizon. It was vital to control the dissemination of ideas and information. The passing of the Act acknowledged the necessity to control the context of the cinematic performance – the cinema hall and the crowds – as well as its content. Inasmuch as it was an effort to order the cinema to the requirements of state and society, the Act signalled the state's recognition that cinema had come to stay in India.

Cinema Halls and Localities, 1913-1928

The earliest cinema halls in Bombay were located in two distinct zones of the city. The Excelsior and the Empire were on Ravelin Street in the Fort area. The rest of the halls were outside the Fort, in the area known as the Native Town. For a long time, the two halls in the Fort area garnered a disproportionate amount of the cultural capital of the cinema industry. These halls were plush picture-palaces catering to Europeans, Eurasians and upper-class Indians. They showed an exclusive selection of imported films, mainly Hollywood social dramas, comedies and costume dramas. They were theatre halls and provided the audience with comfortable surroundings.[28] The Empire had a good orchestra led by European and Indian conductors to accompany film shows. JP Da Costa, a local conductor, was in charge of the music for the film version of *La Tosca*.[29]

The Sandhurst Road Cinemas, 1910-1917

The Fort halls set the standards for the others. The get-up of the hall, the films that were shown there and the clients they drew reflected the logic of the Fort area – an area cordoned off from the city for the pleasure of its elite. The rest of the cinema halls were located in an area which was the hub of the *bazaar* economy of the city. Between 1913 and 1916, most of the building activity was on Sandhurst Road. This road came up in the 1910s and the cinema halls grew with the road. In 1909, the Commissioner of Police remarked that it was one of the 'most useful roads recently constructed'.[30] In fact, the earliest cinema halls – the Coronation, the American-India, the Olympia and the New Alhambra – were located at street junctions along this road

[26] *BC*, 28 Nov., 1914.
[27] *ARBP*, 1916, p.19.
[28] *ICCE*, v. I, p.46.
[29] *BC*, 18 Oct., 1919.
[30] SM Edwardes, *The Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island*, v. I (Bombay, 1909), p.364.

surrounded by large open spaces. The Coronation, built in 1912,[31] was located at the Sandhurst Road-Khetwadi Main Road junction.[32] The American-India moved to the Sandhurst Road-Charni Road crossing[33] in 1911.[34] The Alhambra stood near the junction of Sandhurst Road and Parel Road.[35] The Olympia was located near the Coronation, next to the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya (the music school run by VD Paluskar).[36] All adjacent open spaces were filled up with shops, hotels, office buildings and residential blocks in the five years leading up to the war. In 1909, the government was being able to sell land at rupees 75 to rupees 150 a square yard on Sandhurst Road. Only the Esplanade and parts of the Native Town were costlier.[37]

Sandhurst Road was uniquely placed as most of the important streets of the bazaar opened on to it. The halls drew their audiences from Charni Road, Null Bazar, Lohar Chawl, Kalbadevi Road and Girgaum Road. These areas were filled with wholesale dealers and shops selling goods of all kinds, employing a considerable section of the work-force of the city. They were characterised by crowded streets and high-paced commercial activity. Merchants, shop-keepers, clerks, coolies, servants, hack-victoria drivers and young people would have formed the audience of the shows in these halls.

As corrugated-iron halls gave way to 'picture palaces', show timings were fixed to fit the rhythms of commerce and urban life. Cinema halls began to have a more varied ticketing system. Most halls had three shows with extra matinees thrown in on weekends. Tickets ranged between two rupees and two annas.[38] Show times were flexible and the programme announced could be changed suddenly due to the non-arrival of the films. With the coming of the war, the shows were extended to include a comic film and a news gazette as part of the programme. Cinema-watching became a more varied and complex experience – an experience joined to the growing urbanity of early twentieth century Bombay. By 1918, the Sandhurst Road halls had done a pioneering job of settling in the cinema habit amongst large sections of the Bombay populace. Already on 13 April 1913, *Rast Goftar*, a leading Bombay daily, declared: 'The cinema theatres in Bombay draw thousands of men everyday.'[39]

The growth of the halls reflected the increasing commercial activity in this area during the war. War-time saw a boom in building activity as a result of the growth of a more commercialised bazaar economy. Cinema was part of this new outgrowth of Indian commercial life – a commerce based on the logic of branded commercial goods and individuated commercial ventures. The change in the configuration of the city's commerce implied changes in the lifestyles of its commercial communities and workers. If the maze of streets bordering Sandhurst Road reflected an older style of mercantile capitalism, Sandhurst Road itself was the symbol of the new economy based on branded goods and leisure spent in the cinema, restaurants and retail shops. Cinema became a branded good to be sold to new classes of audiences being formed in this period.

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[31] *ARBP*, 1912, p.14.
[32] *TOID*, 1914, p.641.
[33] *TOID*, 1912, p.586.
[34] *ARBP*, 1911, pp.12-13.
[35] *TOID*, 1913, p.618.
[36] *TOID*, 1914, p.639.
[37] Edwardes (1909), p.328.
[38] Information from *BC*.
[39] *Weekly Report on the Native Newspapers*, 1913, p.28. Henceforth *RNNP*.

The Grant Road-Lamington Road Cinemas, 1917-1928

From 1917, the focus of cinema hall construction shifted from Sandhurst Road to the Grant Road-Lamington Road axis. Imperial and El Dorado opened that year.[40] Majestic and Precious followed a year later.[41] The new cinema halls were built along important thoroughfares bordering densely packed residential and commercial areas. While Grant Road served the other end of the same streets that opened on to Sandhurst Road, it had in addition a more cosmopolitan atmosphere. Billiards rooms, bars, refreshment rooms, bakeries, professional chambers, schools and upmarket residential localities gave it a more urbane outlook than the *bazaar*s characterising Sandhurst Road.[42] Its theatres, patronised by the indigenous elite, made it the Native Town's equivalent of the theatre world of the Fort.

The new halls were built to a different plan. Imperial, Royal and Majestic were bungalows converted into cinema halls. The Mangaldas Bungalow on the junction of Lamington Road and Girgaum Back Road became Imperial cinema, raising protests from Sir Narayan Chandavarkar, a judge in the Bombay High Court, on account of its proximity to the YMCA and other hostels.[43] These halls stood in courtyards which had shops, trees and wooden benches placed for spectators waiting for shows to begin.[44] The New El Dorado (owned by Signor Colonello, who had earlier run a tent-show at the Maidan) had balcony seating.[45] The new cinema halls projected a different image of the cinema. They were symbolic of the cinema-as-urban-lifestyle, an activity which had to be separated from humdrum routine and stood for cultural capital to be gained from the experience. If the Sandhurst Road halls sold cinema as a new commodity, the Grant Road-Lamington Road halls bestowed prestige on it. By the mid-1920s the Grant Road-Lamington Road cinema halls had run the Sandhurst Road halls out of business.

These halls marked a change in the strategies of marketing cinema in the period following the war. The war had been a boom period for cinema exhibition. The newer parts of the city reflected the changed sensibility and so did the cinema halls. Entrepreneurs who had made sizeable profits during the war ploughed them into the exhibition business. Cinema outside the Fort was no longer a mere entertainment form – a leisure pursuit for the masses. It came to occupy a position of prestige in the self-perception of the owners of the halls and the audiences. This was reflected in the architecture and decor of the halls. Imperial boasted two sculptured elephants flanking its entrance. Majestic cinema's newspaper advertisement included a litho-print of the hall.[46] The immediacy of the image of the hall in the advertisement assured patrons of its respectability.

Lamington Road (another road that came up in the 1910s) had an even higher index of urbanity than Grant Road. The Royal Opera House (ROH), which opened in 1915, quickly became a symbol of the shifting scale of entertainment halls in the so-called Native Town. Financed by JF Karaka, a Parsi businessman, and Maurice Bandmann, the ROH was one of the cultural sites where distinctions between the

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[40] *ARBP*, 1917, p.17.
[41] *ARBP*, 1918, pp.17-18.
[42] Information from *TOID*.
[43] *Proceedings of the Judicial Department*, Government of Bombay, 1917, p.42. Henceforth *BJP*.
[44] Pandya (1995), p.16.
[45] *BC*, 9 Apr., 1917.
[46] *BC*, 13 Jan., 1925.

Joneses and the masses broke down in the post-war years.[47] Combining imported music-hall entertainment, Parsi theatre and imported cinema, it catered to a mixed audience of Europeans and Indian upper and middle classes. It became a major site of interaction between Indian and Western popular cultures. 'Oriental' dancers and bands performing at the ROH passed on musical and dance techniques to their Indian counterparts. June 1918 saw the performances of Madamoiselle Bibi Jan, 'exponent of Turkish dances'[48] and Roshanara's Delhi gypsy dance.[49]

The ROH was advertised in the newspapers for weeks before its actual opening, building up the unimaginable treasures of comfort and pleasure it was soon to offer.[50] Boasting a Parisian music-hall facade, it was projected as a public enterprise for Bombay. The facilities it provided outstripped the halls in the Fort. The ROH symbolised the new era of entertainment in post-war Bombay. In keeping with the increasing commodification of leisure activities, the ROH reflected the attitudes and changed lifestyles of the new middle classes. To partake of urbane and Westernised entertainment forms was culture as well as politics for this new class of Indians, who were increasingly contesting British racial discrimination *vis-à-vis* civic space in every sphere of activity.

The expansion of cinema audiences outside the Fort was due to the increase in the population of students, lawyers, clerks, shop-keepers, petty-traders and workers in the areas surrounding the Grant Road-Lamington Road axis. Lamington Road was a favourite hunting ground for rented accommodation for students coming from the Gujarat hinterland to study in Bombay.[51] The hostel of the Sydenham College of Commerce was located on Charni Road. Girgaum and Kalbadevi Road housed numerous students and single working men entering the city in large numbers.[52] This area was the hub of Indian cultural and political activities in the 1920s. Regional language and political newspaper offices were located here, as were music schools, photography studios, art galleries and shops. A distinct public culture was developing in the Grant Road-Lamington Road axis.

Cinema in the Suburbs

From the mid-1920s, a new exhibition locale was developing to the north of Grant Road. The mill areas of Parel and Sewri had been rather late in taking off in the cinema hall building activity. Some cinema halls were on Parel Road and Chinchpokly Road in the heart of the mill district. Venus cinema was on Parel Chawl Road.[53] Laxmi was in the Jacob Sassoon mill area off Suparibaug Road.[54] Both halls were built by 1924. Saraswati cinema on De Lisle Road near the Globe Mills was built around 1927.[55] The newly developing suburb of Dadar was becoming the centre of another film culture. After 1925, halls like Kohinoor, near the Dadar Railway station, and Surya Cinema on Dadar Road (West) served the middle-class suburbs.[56]

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[47] *TOI*, 1 Feb., 1936.
[48] *BC*, 14 June, 1918.
[49] *BC*, 23 June, 1918.
[50] *TOI*, 1 Feb., 1936.
[51] Interview with P Jairaj.
[52] Details from *TOID*.
[53] *TOID*, 1924, p.644.
[54] *TOID*, 1924, p.679.
[55] *TOID*, 1927, p.398.
[56] Information from *TOID*.

Kohinoor aimed its fare specially at the 'Residents of Dadar and Suburbs'.[57] The Cinema de Luxe opened in Bandra in 1922 and functioned for a few years.[58]

The mill-area cinema halls were built on densely populated streets that contained mills, shops, schools, liquor shops and refreshment rooms.[59] The spectators included workers, school children attending the municipal schools and a smattering of clerical workers and shop-keepers. These halls were simple one-storied buildings and showed an unending fare of serials and over time, Bombay films.[60] Seating was mostly on benches or on the floor. Show timings were flexible as compared to the halls in the rest of the city. If a film happened to be popular, it could be shown up to twelve times a day to make a healthy profit.[61] By the end of the 1920s, it was clear that cinema had become an important cultural institution for the workers. In 1927, the Girni Kamgar Theatre on Chinchpokly Road became the Raghuvir Theatre – a cinema hall. Earlier, the theatre used to stage workers' plays, religious programmes and, most popularly, wrestling matches.[62] Now the pendulum had swung in favour of cinema.

The cinema halls around Dadar-Mahim served the white-collared workers – a mix of Gujarati and Marathi middle classes and some elements of the working classes. Kohinoor showed a mixed fare of imported serials, features and Bombay films compared to the almost uninterrupted programme of Bombay films in halls such as Venus in the mill area. In July 1928, Kohinoor was showing Kohinoor's *Telephone-ni Taruni* and instalments of the serials *Fight and Win* and *Leather Pushers*.[63]

The films shown in these halls were re-runs of films already shown in the city centre. Class distinctions were becoming important in choosing programmes and even if such distinctions could not be strictly maintained, the film market was becoming increasingly stratified. Although most halls showing Bombay films had ticket prices ranging from two annas to two rupees, halls like Majestic and Imperial had more high-priced seats than low-priced ones.[64] This meant that viewership in such halls was slanted towards the affluent classes. In contrast, in Laxmi cinema in Parel, the highest ticket price was eight annas.[65] Of course, there was a thriving black market in cinema tickets by contractors who bought up blocks of tickets to sell at a profit of one or two pice.[66]

The distinctions in the quality of cinema halls along class lines could be mapped on to the topography of the city. There was a world of difference between the end of the Girgaum street opening on to Sandhurst Road and the one leading up to Grant Road. And although Lady Jamsetji Road led up to Parel, there was a significant difference in the crowds peopling the cinema halls on either side of the BB&CI railway line. Although everyone from the Fort to Borivili saw the same films, the contexts in which they were seen were markedly different. The stratification in audience tastes went a long way towards expanding the exhibition circuit and ensured that a substantial section of the population saw films without having to step outside

[57] *BC*, 21 July, 1928.
[58] *BC*, 14 Oct., 1922.
[59] Information from *TOID*.
[60] *ICCE*, v. I, 350-364.
[61] *ICCE*, p.110.
[62] *Annual Report of the Girni Kamgar Union*, Bombay, 1928, p.47.
[63] *BC*, 28 July, 1928.
[64] *ICCE*, v. I, p.414.
[65] *ICCE*, v. I, p.49.
[66] *ICCE*, v. I, p.112.

their locality. More audience niches meant more films in the market, and more films translated into more cinema halls. The film industry responded to this shading of audience segments by evolving a system of first-run, second-run and in some cases, even third-run cinemas. According to this routine, films were first released in the upmarket theatres of Grant Road-Lamington Road and depending on popularity, were then traded off to suburban and mill-area halls. Social romances were seldom passed down the line. Thus the more expensive halls saw the films first and the cheaper ones later.

Film Genres in the Early Phase of Exhibition in Bombay

Exhibitors could rarely choose what to buy. Shop-owners paid duty on films at Customs and recovered their expenses from exhibitors who bought or hired them. Film was valued by the footage bought and shown.[67] Films were advertised according to the footage of action, thrills and frills on the screen. Little high-cultural value was imputed to cinema-watching. Spectators valued the 'amount' of pleasure (measured in terms of the length of the film and therefore the time spent at the hall) derived from chases, romance and thrilling denouements. For example, episodes 12 and 13 of *The Flames*, a 'picture out of the ordinary' dealing with 'occultation and full of tense situations', measured 4000 feet and 'each foot [was] a separate thrill'.[68] Only when a special film had been bought at special prices would charges be based on the content of the film. The El Dorado raised the prices for *Maciste Alpino* and did away with half rates, emphasising the 'great cost of the film' and its widespread popularity in Europe.[69] Such special films were usually historical spectacles. *Quo Vadis?* was first shown in 1913 at Excelsior and repeated many times on public demand.[70] Such shows must have been special since on the occasion of the release of *Quo Vadis?*, the Excelsior was at pains to emphasise that it specialised in 'films, as distinct from variety show'.[71] But even then, a high-quality film like *Quo Vadis?* was valued for the fact that 'Every inch of the Film is a New Master Piece'.[72] For a long time, cinema's cultural value was subordinate to the technology and the economy that made it possible.

The 1910s were the decade of the serials. Pathé's strategy of posing as the 'house of serials' and 'the small exhibitor's friend' went down well with a nascent exhibition business yet to reach financial maturity.[73] The hectic life of a *bazaar* port - city like Bombay was reflected in the fare provided – French and American serials depicting adventurous globe-trotters and fortune-hunters in mysterious and suspenseful situations. A newspaper, providing one of the earliest reports on Bombay cinema culture, saw the combination of 'hair-raising or salacious' films and the 'vulgar glare of lights, strident cacophony of music' inside the halls as 'an unmitigated nuisance for a crowded residential locality' like Girgaum. It was not surprising that the newspaper dubbed Girgaum 'the film district of Bombay', located as it was between Sandhurst Road and Grant Road-Lamington Road.[74] The pace of the

[67] For example, the American-India Cinema on Charni Road advertised '50,000 feet of film' for sale. *BC*, 2 Sept., 1916.
[68] *BC*, 6 July, 1918.
[69] *BC*, 19 May, 1917.
[70] *BC*, 21 June, 1913.
[71] *BC*, 7 June, 1913.
[72] *BC*, 14 June, 1913.
[73] Singer (2001), p.214.
[74] *Subodh Patrika*, 10 Dec., 1917, *RNNP*, 1917, p.15.

city was changing and cinema was an intrinsic component of urban transformation – both in terms of its narratives of fast-paced action and the noisy excitement generated by film culture.

Most of the serials dealt with narratives of colonisation of economic and geographic frontiers by global business. The villains were gangs backed by unscrupulous capitalists who were chastised at the end by the forces of bourgeois order based on the logic of statist capitalism backed by the law.[75] A popular serial of the times, *The Fighting Trail*, was advertised as 'a marvellous melodrama of a man, a mighty struggle for a girl and her fortune against the cataclysmic forces of wild nature, and the lawless band of marauders lurking in the shadows of a wilderness'.[76] Such films must have gone down well with the noisy *bazaar* crowds in Bombay who were making a similar transition from speculative mercantile capitalism to industrial and commercial capitalism at the time.[77] Fights between gangs of various nationalities were common.[78] The city was in the grip of a 'Pathan Scare' throughout the 1910s and 1920s. Crimes against commercial communities were on the rise. The wartime atmosphere heightened the atmosphere of uncertainty and adventure. The cinema hall itself was sometimes the locus of such sensational adventure as in the Painda Shah-Fatma murder case (in the 1920s) which was solved on the evidence of a young boy seated next to the victim (an Arab woman who acted as a procuress for elderly widowers) and Fatma (the woman convicted of the crime) in a cinema hall. Fatma happened to have raised her *burkha* to watch the film allowing a glimpse of her face that ultimately gave her away.[79]

By highlighting stunts and physical daredevilry, film advertisements projected a sporty image for cinema. The main protagonists were more often than not good sportsmen. The regular exhibition of horse-racing films like *Winning the Futurity* was intended to 'appeal to sporting instincts of the Bombay Racers' as well as to their fascination for physical prowess.[80] Bombay was the biggest racing city in India and such marketing ploys undoubtedly went down well with the audiences. Exotic jungle adventures featuring strongmen like Tarzan or Maciste were also popular. In addition, Charlie Chaplin and Max Linder, the greatest comedians of the silent era, reigned supreme amongst all classes, as did the pranks of the child star Marie Osborne. To borrow a phrase from the advertisement for *The Secret Kingdom*, 'The motif of Beauty, Strength, Romance' permeated 'each and every episode' of this film culture.[81] Cinema was the educator par excellence when it came to trading lessons in new physical and personality regimes demanded by modernisation.

Serials like *Fantomas*, *Judex*, the Nick Winter series and those featuring female adventuresses such as Pearl White, Ruth Roland, Grace Darmond and Irene Castle, and male adventurers such as Elmo Lincoln and Eddie Polo mixed international commercial adventurism, scientific wonders, escapes involving trains, planes and shipwrecks and exotica to appeal to the instincts of a port-city audience

[75] On the early serial film, see Kalton C Lahue, *Bound and Gagged: The Story of the Silent Serials* (New York, 1968).
[76] *BC*, 1 June, 1918.
[77] A similar point is made in Singer (2001), pp.131-148.
[78] Report about the goings-on in Sankli Street in *Praja Mitra and Parsi*, 2 May, 1920 in MSA, Judicial Department files, 150 Pt. II/1920. Henceforth JD files.
[79] OIOC, MSS Eur/D954 (Memoirs of Richard Keith Hampton entitled *The Three Zs – Zar, Zan, Zamin: 25 Years With Bombay Police*), p.289.
[80] *BC*, 7 June, 1919.
[81] *BC*, 27 July, 1918.

like Bombay's. Several had Oriental settings. For example, *Dropped From the Clouds* featured the adventures of 'cowboys in a Turkish Harem'.[82] *The Adventures of Kathlyn* (1913) starred Charles Clary as a Sikh villain[83] and *The Yellow Menace* (1916) starred Edwin Stevens as Ali Singh – a fanatical Oriental bent on destroying the United States.[84] *The Adventures of Kathlyn* had Kathlyn Williams playing Kathlyn Hare, an American girl who, in order to recover her kidnapped father, becomes Queen of Allahah, a princely state in India.[85] Zudora, the next Thanhouser serial, featured Hassam Ali, 'a Hindu mystic', and a diamond-maker named Bengal who however was iconographically supposed to convey a Jewish character.[86] The great success of Annette Kellerman's *A Daughter of Gods* might have been as much due to the 'absolutely bewitching scenes' in the 'Sultan's Harem with thousands of *zenana* ladies' as to the aquatic charms that took advantage of Kellerman's reputation as an Olympic swimming champion.[87] *A Daughter of Gods* was described as 'Uncomparably the Noblest and the Finest Film ever seen!'[88]

The Pathé Pearl White serial *Lightning Raider* shown at the Gaiety in 1919, [89] featured the dark-skinned Boris Karloff in one of his earliest film roles.[90] It also featured Warner Oland as Wu Fang, an Oriental villain. Karloff's father had an East Indian mother and probably spent a lot of time as government official in Girgaum in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[91] Half a century on, his grandson was entertaining crowds in the same district but this time as a mobile photo-image on the silver screen. The *Hope Diamond Mystery* (1921), shown at the Empress in 1922,[92] was subtitled 'In the Clutches of the Hindu'[93] and the Hindu was none other than Karloff playing Dakar, the priest of Kamsita. Karloff went on to play a number of Arab-Indian roles including Ahmed Khan in *Without Benefit of Clergy* (1921) and Nei Ahmed in the Universal serial *Cheated Hearts* the same year.[94] The former was based on a short story by Rudyard Kipling and was billed as 'A Romance of Lahore' when shown at the Empire in 1922.[95] *Kismet*, shown at the Wellington in 1922, promised its spectators 'Weird Oriental Dances', 'Scenes of Imperial Zennana and Hamamkhana Where Hundreds of Court Beauties Bathe' and 'Court Splendour and Janana Intrigues' in a 'Wild, Barbaric Romantic Story of Ancient Islam'.[96] Well into the 1920s, an imported film with 'Oriental' settings like *In the Shadows of the Harem* would be shown at Imperial (generally associated with Bombay productions) with special intertitles in Gujarati, Hindi and Urdu.[97]

Early film culture in Bombay was part of the breathtaking excitement generated by modernisation. Speed, speculation, glamour, technology and physical

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[82] *BC*, 27 July, 1918.
[83] Lahue (1968), p.16.
[84] Lahue (1968), p.26.
[85] Singer (2001), pp.213-214.
[86] Singer (2001), pp.283-284.
[87] *BC*, 2 Nov., 1918.
[88] *BC*, 5 Nov., 1918.
[89] *BC*, 24 Jul., 1919.
[90] Scott Allen Nollen, *Boris Karloff: A Gentleman's Life* (Baltimore, 1999), p.31.
[91] Nollen (1999), pp.17-19.
[92] *BC*, 23 Sept., 1922.
[93] *ICCE*, v. I, p.144.
[94] Nollen (1999), pp.276-277.
[95] *BC*, 12 Aug., 1922.
[96] *BC*, 9 Sept., 1922.
[97] *BC*, 6 Apr., 1929.

strength came together in the endless reels of adventure, romance, physical comedy and exotica as in the rapidly transforming urban landscape of a metropolis, now beginning to be dotted with motorcars, mills, aeroplanes, ocean-liners, guns, films, sporting spectacles and modern lifestyles. Indeed, from the very beginning, cinema was advertised as part of general urban activity – exotic and mundane at the same time. The 'Amusements Column' in the *Chronicle*, listing cinemas and films, was set amidst reports of accidents, robberies, disasters, strikes by *rickshawallas*, court cases and general city events that mimicked film melodrama and thrills. It also emphasised the mundaneness of the continuity between urban life inside and outside the cinema hall. Occasionally, an advertisement for the miracle cure of a 'dying girl' by clerics like Rev GR Walters[98] would find its way into the cinema pages as would advertisements for branded goods. Urban experience, consumption and urban culture narrativised through newspaper reportage and advertisement bracketed early Bombay film culture.

The mood evoked by early film culture was acutely reflected in the reading habits of the city. Lists of books on sale at various bookshops reveal a healthy proportion of detective or gothic novels of the Sherlock Holmes, Marie Corelli,[99] Wilkie Collins and Hall Caine variety, whose central themes were often property disputes and adventurism. The works of a nineteenth century gothic-detective writer like GMW Reynolds were not only popular in India but also inspired the adventure serial in the West.[100] Extremely popular amongst the Victorian middle classes at the turn of the century, this literature now became formative for the reading habits of the emerging Indian middle classes.[101] A later historian of the theatre grumbled that 'the Urdu *kavi*s made the utmost use of materials furnished by the popular novelist of questionable morals, G. Reynolds.' Corelli too was performed on the Bombay stage.[102] By the 1920s, a thriller writer like Edgar Wallace was supposed to have written a fourth of all the books read in the world and was immensely popular in India. Like Wallace's novels, the serials were a pastiche of the gothic, the detective and the wild-west variety of adventurism and his works were frequently filmed. A visitor to Bombay in the late 1920s observed, 'The general public feed on cheap novels, and abhor serious reading. The number of reading public is increasing every year'.[103] Indeed, Mohanlal Dave, the leading scenarist of the Bombay industry, was compared to Edgar Wallace for the rate at which he churned out his scripts, not a few of which were translations of Western pulp literature and serial films.[104]

The film serials themselves were novelised in Indian languages. For example, *Suvarna Pratima*, an 'Illustrated Mystery Filled Novel', was based on the 'scenes seen from the film' *Million Dollar Mystery* – a popular serial in the 1910s. It was

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[98] *BC*, 26 Nov., 1921.
[99] On the popularity of the novels of Marie Corelli, see Annette R Federico, *Idol of Suburbia: Marie Corelli and Late-Victorian Culture* (Charlottesville, 2000). Corelli's novels were officially translated in two Indian languages – Hindustani and Gujarati.
[100] On the connections between the gothic novel and the detective novel, adventure films and the social melodrama, see Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook and Christine Gledhill (eds.), *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen* (London, 1994).
[101] On the influence of these writers on the Indian middle classes, see Priya Joshi, 'Culture and Consumption: Fiction, the Reading Public, and the British Novel in Colonial India', *Book History*, v.1, no.1, 1998.
[102] RK Yajnik, *The Indian Theatre* (London, 1969), p.184.
[103] Ben Diqui, *A Visit to Bombay* (London, 1927), p.38.
[104] Interview with Homi Wadia.

published in 1918 and by 1922 was into its second edition.[105] The Thanhouser serial was one of the most successful ever produced.[106] It may be worth mentioning that Chunilal Vardhaman Shah, author of *Suvarna Pratima*, translated Reynolds' *The Bronze Statue* as *Pisach Mandir* in 1918, the same year as *Suvarna Pratima*. The world of Victorian gothic fiction, prolific translations into Indian languages and imported serials made up the cultural fabric of Bombay film culture. Translated synopses of serials were on sale that allowed audiences to follow the action. Chimanlal Fatehlal Arbastani and Gulabchand Maganlal Gektivala of Surat produced translated synopses of *The Gray Ghost* as *Bhamto Bhut* (The Wandering Ghost) and of *The Mystery Ship* as *Ganje Seetam yane Nauka Rahasya* (The Vessel of Fear or The Mystery Ship). The former had a print run of 1000 copies. These were published by the Jain Engine Printing Press, Surat.[107] It may be mentioned that in 1926, Kohinoor (the leading Bombay studio of the 1920s) produced a crime-thriller called *Bhamto Bhut* featuring Sulochana, the superstar of that decade.[108]

By the late 1910s, certain halls in the Native Town began to switch from serials to feature-length social or social-intrigue films. Ethnic and class barriers were crumbling as the city became the educational and commercial capital of western India, attracting a new generation of workers, students, professionals and businessmen. A new generation was taking charge of the city, a generation which was far more open to urbane lifestyles and influences from the West.

By 1919, Lamington Road was home to Empress, the cousin of the Empire. Opened with fanfare, it continued to tread the liminal space between classes and ethnicity. The Empire and Empress worked out a routine of alternating the same film schedule to level the standards of entertainment on both sides of the town. The Empress' significance was in disseminating the cinema habit for Hollywood features despite being, as one observer at the ICC put it, 'in the bazaar'.[109] The same year, Globe cinema opened on the junction of Charni Road and Lamington Road. Its advertisement ran, 'The New World is in Sight! You have to wait only a few days. The New Globe will be a place where all will have Equal Rights. No differentiation between the East and the West.'[110] By 1925, halls like Cine Madeleine and the Wellington showed social features regularly.[111]

The success of feature films and of stars like Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, the Hollywood comedians and child stars was an index of growing film-awareness. An appreciation of this awareness on the part of exhibitors can be discerned in the selective marketing by KD and Brothers of films in the Sandhurst Road and the Grant Road-Lamington Road cinema halls. The Globe on Sandhurst Road became home to serial films, while West End at the Lamington Road-Charni Road crossing showed only features. The West End would show 'no serial and no Indian film' while Globe was devoted exclusively to the 'best serial chapter plays and the pick of Indian productions'.[112] Imperial fitted extra fans and special ventilators

[105] Preface of Chunilal Vardhaman Shah, *Suvarna Pratima*, (2nd edition, Ahmedabad, 1922).
[106] Singer (2001), p.214.
[107] Chimanlal Fatehlal Arbastani and Gulabchand Maganlal Gektivala, *Bhamto Bhut* (Surat, 1919) and Arbastani and Gektivala, *Ganje Seetam yane Nauka Rahasya* (Surat, 1919).
[108] *LOA*, p.108.
[109] *ICCE*, v. I, p.306.
[110] *BC*, 4 Oct., 1919.
[111] Information from *BC*.
[112] *EIC*, p.124.

to go with its increasing specialisation in features.[113] The West End further distanced itself from the implied association between serials and low-class entertainment by announcing that its films were 'not a serial – but a one weeks drama'.[114] The Empress advertised Vitagraph's comedy *A Common Cause* by emphasising that 'It is not a melodrama of the sporting world, of railroad, of war or of any of the conventional backgrounds'.[115] In other words, it was not a serial. The serials were increasingly identified with working-class and semi-literate tastes, while the features were aimed at Westernised young people. An estimate of audience segments for halls showing 'light literature films appealing to middle class taste' (for example, Wellington, West End and Empress) presented to the ICC showed that 35 percent of the audience consisted of educated people and of the total audience only five percent were Europeans.[116]

The growth of the audience for features followed popular reading habits in Bombay. For example, *Mother o' Mine* was advertised as 'the sweetest story on stage and screen based on Kipling's poem'.[117] European classics like *The Count of Monte Cristo*[118] and *Lady of the Camelias*[119] or adaptations of Shakespeare and historical classics like *Quo Vadis?* or *Sign of the Cross*[120] did extremely well. Even more popular were adaptations of the novels of Marie Corelli and Hall Caine that had already provided inspiration for the Parsi stage. Adaptations of Corelli's *Temporal Power*,[121] *God's Good Man*,[122] *Sorows of Satan* and *Thelma*, Hall Caine's *Manxman*,[123] Rider Haggard's *She*[124] and *Mr. Meeson's Will*[125] or Ouida's *Cigarette or Under Two Flags* starring Theda Bara[126] and the famous Victorian morality play *East Lynne*[127] set the pace for a spate of social problem films, especially centred on women, starring the young Joan Crawford, Constance and Norma Talmadge, Dolores Cassinelli, Clara Kimball Young, Corinne Griffith and Mary Pickford.

By the 1920s, the marketing of imported films had reached a sophisticated pitch. Publicity campaigns by companies like Universal and Pathé carried the fame of stars and films into the interstices of Bombay's social life in a more intimate manner than before. Publicity helped sell the feature as the acme of the film-watching habit by connecting to the biggest names in Hollywood. The star made the feature a more classy affair. Over time, the cinema habit itself was responsible for the growing sophistication of audience expectations. It went hand in hand with the publicity drive to create tastes for new kinds of films.

The shift to features in some Native Town cinema halls signified the entrenchment of a new audience taste for social problem films.[128] These films demanded a different kind of attention to cinema than that demanded by the serial,

[113] *BC*, 21 Apr., 1917.
[114] *BC*, 6 Sept., 1919.
[115] *BC*, 25 Oct., 1919.
[116] *ICCE*, v. I, p.549.
[117] *BC*, 11 Oct., 1918.
[118] *BC*, 2 Aug., 1919.
[119] *BC*, 18 May, 1918.
[120] *BC*, 19 Feb.,1916.
[121] *BC*, 25 May, 1917.
[122] *BC*, 27 Dec., 1919.
[123] *BC*, 1 Nov., 1919.
[124] *BC*, 26 Oct., 1918.
[125] *BC*, 9 Aug., 1919.
[126] *BC*, 30 Nov., 1918.
[127] *BC*, 30 Aug., 1919.
[128] *ICCE*, v. III, p.764.

with its stress on action rather than narrative. The features also presumed a different sort of relationship with European culture based on a familiarity with the cultural mores and lifestyles of Europe. Spectators had to know enough English to follow the story through the titles. They also had to be aware of the generic modes of address of the European social romance. Not surprisingly, the biggest hits of the day were historical extravaganzas, comedies and fantasy costume dramas whose visual glamour cut across class barriers. The turn of halls like West End, Majestic and Imperial towards feature socials was an indicator of the growing class distinctions within indigenous audiences.

The first ten years of film exhibition in Bombay had an enormous impact on Bombay films in the 1920s. The Wadia brothers saw films from all countries in the 1910s at a prodigious rate, by tramping over all the cinema hall districts of Bombay. Their favourite genre was of course the imported serial film, which influenced their choice to produce stunt films under their own banner and invent the first female stunt superstar of Bombay cinema, Fearless Nadia.[129] Tastes had been created by imported cinema and Bombay filmmakers were obliged to provide entertainment that could compete with imported films. However, only certain elements of imported cinema, usually those that had prior referents in Indian cultural practice or social ecumene, were taken up by Indian filmmakers.

Critics, since the earliest times, have characterised such cultural cross-overs as evidence of Indian cinema's tendency to 'copy' Western cultural modes. Most ICC respondents were unanimous that Bombay films, especially stunt films, were copies of Western films. The reason for the absence of the upper classes from cinema halls showing Bombay films was, according to Naval Gandhi, because 'All our films are an imitation of western films'.[130] Such accusations had little basis in empirical reality since, as will be seen, the Indian upper classes did go to see Bombay films. His accusation reproduces the hegemonic essentialising intentions of a monolithic national culture based on high-literary norms that fails to see the specificity of cultural practice and its operative field. Once cultural practice reaches a sufficient level of public usage, experimentation based on translations of existing cultural forms along popular lines becomes an important norm for further elaboration of the field. Constraining and enabling factors in the field of practice such as audience taste, the influence of existing comparable cultural products or the preferences of filmmakers preclude a transcendental evaluation of cultural content. Unless Bombay cinema is considered part of a larger general cinematic world, the material conditions of its functioning will be bypassed for ahistorical essentialist cultural arguments.

The points of commonality between Bombay and imported films followed cultural preferences which filtered influences between the diverse cultural universes. The popularity of the Douglas Fairbanks stunt films allowed studios to cash in on the craze for stunt films by making indigenous versions of the genre which dovetailed well with the ethos of the princely states (home to substantial sections of the audience), and with the emergent Gujarati bourgeoisie's project to reclaim a Rajput identity. Films featuring Olympic star Annette Kellerman were very popular, undoubtedly because of the titillation provided by the 'Venus like' bathing beauties in scanty clothing.[131] The ubiquitous bathing scenes in Bombay films based on stories

[129] Interview with Homi Wadia.
[130] *ICCE*, v. I, p.443.
[131] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.25.

from Gujarati folklore and the epic traditions indicate a cultural vogue for such artefacts of cultural performance. A third popular genre consisting of films featuring child stars such as Peggy Cummings and Marie Osborne found a comfortable niche in a society primed by the centrality of the child Krishna as a major cultural star. The popularity of the films of Maciste or Tarzan was understandable in a culture in love with wrestling. It is hardly surprising that such films were emulated when Indian bodybuilders like Nandram (Indian Eddie Polo) and Sandow entered the industry.

Bombay v. Hollywood, 1919-1928

One feature that remained fairly constant in the development of Bombay cinema halls in the 1920s was the growing popularity of Bombay films. In this decade, producers could not be choosy about cinema halls in terms of class since the audience for their films was severely restricted by the presence of imported films. If their ventures were to succeed, films had to be released wherever possible. It was not until around 1928, when a sufficient number of cinema halls had started showing Bombay films all round the year, that a stratified topos of cinema halls *vis-à-vis* Bombay cinema emerged.

From 1919, Indian films started to be shown regularly in some Bombay cinemas. 'By Special Request for the Janmashtami holidays – Phalke's Great Indian Mythological Drama – Krishna-Janma', ran an advertisement for the New Alexandra cinema on Bellasis Road. A week before, it had screened *Lure of the Circus*, touted as 'the greatest serial ever filmed'.[132] In the same week, there was an advertisement for the forthcoming Phalke film *Ahilyoddhar* at Majestic. In the June of that year, two Indian films were released – *Shakuntala* produced by the Oriental Manufacturing Company and Elphinstone's *Soordas* featuring the legendary songstress, Gauhar Jan.[133] A review in the *Bombay Chronicle* noted that 'the motion picture industry in India is progressing with rapid strides. Within the course of a few weeks the New Alexandra has shown two Indian picture-plays, both of which were well received by the public'. The same week's entertainment page carried two large advertisements for Phalke's *Krishna Janma* and Elphinstone's *Bilwamangal*/*Soordas*.[134] The other Indian films shown that year were *Keechaka Vadha*[135]and *Ahilyoddhar* at Majestic,[136] *Kaliya Mardan* at Victoria,[137] *Kabir Kamal* at Imperial,[138] Patankar's *Kacha Devyani*[139] and Oriental's *Shakuntala* at West End[140] and Phalke's *Usha Swapna* at Majestic.[141] The second half of the year saw a flurry of cinema productions in Bombay, Nasik and Calcutta, establishing Indian films as regular events in the city.

The following years saw an increase in the number of Bombay films shown in Bombay. Precious screened the immensely popular *Mricchakatik* by the Oriental Manufacturing Company.[142] On this occasion a gold medal was awarded to the company's Managing Director Chunilal G Munim. In 1921, Globe occasionally showed Indian films, by now mostly films produced in Bombay. It screened *Tridandi*

[132] *BC*, 13 Aug., 1919.
[133] *BC*, 11 June,1919 and *BC*, 14 June, 1919.
[134] *BC*, 14 June, 1919.
[135] *BC*, 5 July, 1919.
[136] *BC*, 23 Aug., 1919.
[137] *BC*, 4 Oct., 1919.
[138] *BC*, 18 Oct., 1919.
[139] *BC*, 25 Oct., 1919.
[140] *BC*, 9 Dec., 1919.
[141] *BC*, 9 Dec., 1919.
[142] *BC*, 13 Aug., 1920.

Sanyas,[143] *Bhasmasoor Mohini*,[144] *Raja Harishchandra*[145] and *Gopichand*,[146] following the trend of earlier years when most Indian films were released in the latter half of the year to coincide with the festive season. Occasionally, it even showed a double bill of a Hollywood film and an Indian one, for example, *Manhattan Madness* and *Sri Krishna Janma* on the occasion of Gokulashtami.[147] *The Blue Fox* along with *Sri Krishna Leela* were screened for Nariyal Purnima.[148] The Empress showed its home-production – Madan's *Ma Durga*.[149] The Empress located at the junction of the European and Native Town, ran a special programme of 'A daily change with the Indian Classics and The World's Best Classics' as 'A Special Attraction During the Hindu Shravan'.[150] Indeed, the hall was the first amongst those showing imported fare to successfully experiment with showing Indian productions.[151] By 1922, Majestic, Imperial and Globe were increasingly showing Bombay films. Even the recently opened Star cinema exhibited the odd Indian film during the festive season. Novelty cinema that opened the same year on Lamington Road also became a regular site for Indian films.[152] In this early phase, the limited cache of Indian productions was repeated in a variety of exhibition contexts to reach various audience configurations.[153] A cinema habit for Bombay films was yet to evolve.

1923 marked the beginning of year-round exhibition of Bombay films at Majestic and Imperial. Through the next couple of years, Bombay films were increasingly screened all over the city. The business received a tremendous boost after new cinema halls opened in the mill areas and the suburbs that mainly showed Bombay films. 1925 saw the opening of the first upmarket cinema hall to exclusively show Bombay films – Krishna at the Dubash Theatre on Charni Road.[154] It also marked the beginning of a new marketing technique for Bombay cinema – the control of a cinema hall by the film-producing company, thereby guaranteeing release of its films and doing away with the onerous task of arranging external distribution.

The confidence to start cinema halls exclusively for Bombay films was only possible with a steady expanding relationship between supply and demand. More importantly, exhibition of Bombay films was becoming financially more lucrative than exhibiting imported ones.[155] 1925 saw the opening of 21 new cinemas in Bombay Presidency bringing the total number of halls to 75, most of which were located outside Bombay and were dedicated to the exhibition of Bombay films.[156] This meant that the audience for Bombay films had reached a critical level. The companies had fought a hard battle against imported films and had gathered a substantial market in the exhibition circuit. The industry was ready for take-off.

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[143] *BC*, 13 Oct., 1921.
[144] *BC*, 17 Sept., 1921.
[145] *BC*, 24 Sept., 1921.
[146] *BC*, 28 Nov., 1921.
[147] *BC*, 12 Aug., 1922.
[148] *BC*, 7 Aug., 1922.
[149] *BC*, 3 Dec., 1921.
[150] *BC*, 12 Aug., 1922.
[151] *ICCE*, v. I, p.17.
[152] Information from *BC*.
[153] Information from *BC*.
[154] *ARBP*, 1924, p.24.
[155] *ICCE*, v. I, p.42.
[156] OIOC, L/PJ/6/1747 (Public and Judicial Department Records), p.179.

Advertising Bombay Cinema

I. Print, Publicity and Bombay Cinema

Bombay cinema's growth was intimately related to configurations of the relationship between media, print and the socio-cultural life of the city. As newspaper and magazine literacy rose, so did interaction between cultural performance and advertising. The relationship was a dialectical one, reflecting the changed sensibilities of post-war Bombay. Newspapers increasingly depended on advertisements for revenue. On the other hand, the use of newspaper advertising became integral to the survival of culture. In addition to disseminating information, advertising normalised the intrusion of new cultural forms into the city's cultural landscape. Daily film advertisements abetted the spread of the cinema habit and reflected the extent to which it had become part of commonplace city life. The revenues earned from this habit were then increasingly invested back into advertising.

Print and Cinema – the case of the Bombay Chronicle

By 1915, cinema advertisements occupied a substantial portion of newspapers like the *Bombay Chronicle* and the *Times of India*. Several pages of the *Bombay Chronicle* were devoted to cinema advertisements. Advertisements became larger, sometimes covering a whole page. Advertisements with lithographic prints depicting key sensational moments of a stunt film or a tense confrontation between hero and heroine frozen in melodramatic iconic poses became common. The Universal Film Manufacturing Company, which entered the distribution and exhibition fray during the war, released spectacular advertisements depicting garlands of star visages enclosing a space which carried the names of the latest films and serials on sale.[157] Indian film companies were quick to translate such publicity ploys by using larger advertising formats from very early on. The advertisement for Phalke's *Ahilyoddhar* carried a film still showing Indra in a Parsi theatre-style *paijama-achkan* suit trying to seduce a *sari*-clad Ahilya.[158] The use of film stills increased with the passage of time. By the end of the 1920s, they were to be found strewn over the entire newspaper, mixing promiscuously with snapshots of public meetings, landscapes and other cultural activities in the country.

The advertisements were worded in extremely formulaic ways using sensationalist adjectives for the action and plot of the film and hyperbolic descriptions of the personae and skills of the stars. Some highlighted the most thrilling moments of a film like a jump from a cliff or from an aeroplane on to a running train or a woman tied to the rails as the train hurtled towards her at top speed. Others carried brief plot summaries or gave the salient features of each episode of a serial film. For example, *Zone of Death* was 'a powerful drama of the villainy of a greedy guardian, the vicissitudes of ardent lovers and the awful wrath of a sorcerer, who by his Black Art, annihilates a whole town while wreaking revenge on a solitary foe'.[159] A very popular ploy was to create an aura of mystery about a masked character in the detective or mystery serials. 'Can you tell us who Tih-Minh is? Where Tih-Minh is? Whether the possessor of the proud name of Tih-Minh is a male or a female?' went the advertisement for Louis Feuillade's *Tih-Minh*.[160] For serials like *Fantomas* and *Judex*, the advertisements sensationalised the terrors of the hooded master criminal in classic

[157] *BC*, 5 Feb., 1919.
[158] *BC*, 23 Aug., 1919.
[159] *BC*, 5 June, 1918.
[160] *BC*, 26 Nov., 1919.

grand guignol style. One of the most innovative advertising exercises was when in 1914, the entire story of the first major stunt serial to be shown in Bombay – *The Perils of Pauline* – was serialised in the pages of the *Bombay Chronicle* on Tuesdays, thus providing a legitimation of its 'literary' qualities.[161] In 1917, the story of *The Mysteries of Myra*, a Pathé serial based on the novel by Hereward Carrington, the American dabbler in the paranormal, appeared every Tuesday and Thursday in the *Bombay Chronicle* during its run at the Olympia.[162] Strongly influenced by the gothic sensibilities of Reynolds, Poe and Corelli, *The Mysteries of Myra* was acclaimed for its depiction of the occult and was partially set in India. Carrington had written a book on *yoga* in 1920. In America and Europe, prose-version newspaper tie-ins were routine affairs for early serial films.[163]

With the advent of the social melodramas, moral conundrums were set up in advertisements describing the abject conditions or the moral transgressions of the characters only for the denouement to be withheld. An unmarried mother, the dissolute son of a rich father in love with a poor girl, a haughty patriarch soon to be chastised by the love of the young couple, a society girl who was too arrogant until she met the hero or a widowed mother fighting for the safety of her children were stock melodramatic scenarios of the social films. In *Her Hour* 'Rita Castle is tempted, she falls, but she rises again and after many wonderful adventures she reaches the goal of her desires'.[164] Morality melodramas like *Damaged Goods* and *East Lynne* were extremely popular.

Film reviews on Saturdays helped reinforce the importance and 'artistic' character of the cinema. In the 1920s, these reviews were usually provided by the distribution or production companies themselves. Independent reviews were almost always laudatory since no newspaper could afford to alienate producers and exhibitors who were 'one of the largest sources of income of every newspaper in Bombay'.[165] Along with the advertisements, they recounted the glories of the film companies and the stars in order to emphasise the charms of a particular production. More than the film, the star and the reputation of the film company were the main selling points.

Print and Cinema – the case of the Mumbai Samachar

Gujarati advertisements in the *Mumbai Samachar* provided a local point-of-view on films – both imported and local. They were larger and more elaborate than the corresponding advertisements for the same films in the *Samachar*'s sister concern, the *Bombay Chronicle*, and appeared all over the newspaper. Using Urdu *ghazal* couplets to give a sense of the melodramatic contents or to extol the beauty of a star, the Gujarati advertisements provided more 'literary' fare than the English ones.[166] The conversion of the ordinary to the extraordinary, the hidden beauty of unseen heroines and the uncertainty of life were favourite themes of the literary quotations used in the advertisements. Ordinary events thus took on a heroic mode when viewed through the

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[161] *BC*, 6 Nov., 1915.
[162] *BC*, 26 May, 1917.
[163] Singer (2001), p.214.
[164] *BC*, 13 Aug., 1919.
[165] *ICCE*, v. I, p.496.
[166] For example, the advertisement for Imperial's *Madan Manjari* carried an epigrammatic couplet –
Insaan ko akkal di hai isi kaam ke liye
Neki badi jaan le anjaam ke liye
(Man has been given intelligence in order to differentiate between the good and the bad for the results of his action). *Mumbai Samachar*, 12 May, 1928. Henceforth *MS.*

romantic prism of Urdu poetry. By 1925, the front page and even the ears of the front page carried film advertisements.[167] The paper also carried advertisements for halls like Surya that were not usually to be found in the *Chronicle*.[168] The *Samachar* advertisements for Bombay films were more elaborate, giving details of cast and their roles in idiomatic publicity parlance. Krishna's *Baap Kamai* was advertised for 'Miss Gulabni Kaatil Acting' (Miss Gulab's Deadly Acting) and 'Miss Putli ane Miss Gauharna Madhurabhav' (The Sweet Sentiments of Misses Putli and Gohar).[169] The corresponding advertisement in the *Chronicle* was a short and workmanlike affair.

Advertisements provided information about the cast, recapitulated established reputations and conferred epithets on the stars. The playful cross-referencing between cinemas of different cultural regimes reflected the passionate excitement generated by early cinema. For film culture, the magic of cinema and its stars was all that mattered. In this world, Douglas Fairbanks' popularity conferred honour upon Master Vithal when he was dubbed the Indian Douglas; or the memory of the success of the Hollywood film translated as *Sanam-ni Shodh-ma* added to the prestige of Saurashtra Film Company's film of the same name.[170] The line between homage and plagiarism for quick profit was a thin and indeterminate one. An in-house game of film knowledge was played between film lovers, abetted by the media.

What also fascinates the reader is how imported films were presented to indigenous audiences in the local idiom. Their names were translated into Urdu and their plots summarised in racy idiomatic Gujarati prose adding an intimate flavour to the filmic experience and making foreign films intelligible. The language of film advertisements demonstrates an autonomous film habit and an interactive film culture in which references were ferried across linguistic and cultural boundaries on the strength of their belonging to the world of the cinema. The punch-line of the advertisement for the serial thriller *40th Door* ran 'Mahobatni Maktabman Ishknun Intehan', which roughly translated meant 'The Test of Romance at the Altar of Love'. In addition, the film title was rendered as *Ishke Namanjoor* (Unrequited Love).[171] Others dispensed with the original title altogether, giving just a Gujarati or Gujarati-Urdu title. For example, a Sansonia film playing at Globe in 1928 was titled *Sharte Mohabbat* (The Wager of Love)[172] or a 'Pathé-Warner Classical Film' was called *Gamdanun Gulab* (Village Rose).[173] Cowboys could be visualised and understood as *Bahadur Velvet* (Brave Velvet), an equivalent of indigenous horse-riding chivalrous cultural icons.[174] Or the beauty of a Hollywood star could be understood in the same terms that described the comeliness of the heroine of a romantic *ghazal*. When it came to heroism and romance, indigenous cultures could generate their own takes on such action in the local idiom. The exchange of cultural ideals ran both ways – if names of imported films carried Gujarati-Urdu equivalents, Bombay films too had English names alongside their Gujarati-Urdu titles.

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[167] The front page of the 3 October, 1925 edition of the *MS* carried advertisements for Pathé Films, Imperial and Globe cinemas and the Saurashtra Film Company. The ears (the top corners of the front page) advertised Krishna and Majestic cinemas.
[168] *MS*, 12 May, 1928
[169] *MS*, 24 Oct., 1925.
[170] *MS*, 28 Jan., 1922.
[171] *MS*, 5 May, 1928.
[172] *MS*, 12 May, 1928.
[173] *MS*, 1 Oct., 1925.
[174] *MS*, 14 Jan., 1922.

Publicity aimed to create an atmosphere in which films were integral to people's lives – the constitution of the cinema habit. In such conditions, a sizeable number of spectators watched films out of sheer habit. The recruitment of avid film-watchers by newspapers to compose advertisements ensured that they were formulated in ever-inventive ways. Newspaper advertisements provided a steady paratext to the cinematic exhibition through which key elements of the cinematic spectacle – melodrama, thrills, reputation of stars and literary qualities of films were reinforced in order to create a continuous cinematic education of public memory. Cinema gained a life of its own outside the cinema hall.

Print and Cinema – Magazines

The first Gujarati film magazine came out in 1924. *Mouj Majah*, launched in Bombay by JK Dwivedi, demonstrated the Gujarati interest in cinema which was becoming quite apparent from trends in local film production.[175] *Movie* was launched the same year but stopped functioning within the year.[176] JS Rutnagar, later a script-writer, started the short-lived *Elfincine* magazine in 1926,[177] published by IK Yajnik, future proprietor of Young India Film Company and a prominent Gandhian. *Kinema* was launched in 1927.[178] *Cinema Star*, edited by CV Rao was started in 1928.[179] The influential Gujarati film-periodical *Chitrapat*, edited by Naginlal Shah, and *Moving Picture Monthly* were launched in 1929.[180] The latter was published by the Mouj Majah Press. Most of the magazines functioned as trade guides with occasional information about the stars. These magazines were immensely popular. *Mouj Majah* had a circulation of 8,500 in 1925.[181] By 1928 its circulation had fallen to 5,500, but even then it outsold a high-culture magazine like *Kumar* whose circulation was only 1,800. It is possible that by the late 1920s, other entertainment magazines like *Beghadi Mouj*, published by the *Sanj Vartaman* press under the editorship of the Gujarati poet Shaida and with a circulation of 11,000 in 1930, had cut into the market of magazines like *Mouj Majah*. New magazines like *Kataryu Gap* had a circulation of 2,000 in 1930.[182]

Mouj Majah was a literary magazine which carried some film information. It was one of several variety magazines named to denote leisure and pleasure which started to come out from Bombay in the 1920s. These magazines carried short stories, essays, serialised novels, poetry and humour in addition to juicy tid-bits on cinema. Other such magazines were *Beghadi Mouj*, *Kataryu Gap*, *Ghadibhar Mouj and Cinema Fan*.[183] Indeed, AB Irfani, owner of *Kataryu Gap*, wrote the script for the 1926 comedy of the same name 'with a ridiculous pen'.[184] As is evident from censorship records, the film was a thinly-disguised satire featuring a magazine named *Katar-U-Gap*.[185] The shared world of the sensational magazines and films can be gauged from the range of magazines published by the Mouj Majah Press. In addition to its flagship publication, it also published a magazine called *Chhupi Police* (The

[175] *EIC*, p.19.
[176] *Statement for Newspapers and Periodicals Published*, 1924. Henceforth *SNP*.
[177] *SNP*, 1927.
[178] *EIC*, p.19.
[179] *SNP*, 1929.
[180] *EIC*, p.20.
[181] *SNP*, 1925.
[182] *SNP*, 1930
[183] Information from the *SNP*.
[184] *BC*, 2 Oct., 1926.
[185] *BGG*, Pt. I. 1926, pp.2378-2379.

Hidden Police), its very name indicating the voyeurism of sensational journalism that encompassed the worlds of crime, scandal, entertainment and leisure.[186] It is easy to imagine a two-way traffic in abductions, chases, underworld scenes and risqué sexuality between films and these magazines.

The magazine names (*Beghadi Mouj* = Moments of Fun, *Kataryu Gap* = Gossip From the Gutter) sought to convey a sense of the act of reading as a pleasurable leisure activity. Their contents likewise reflected this sentiment. Most of the stories were racy historical romances, social stories with a scandalous core and detective stories. Their slant was on gossipy, romantic and salacious humour was also carried over to their coverage of cinema. News about stars and films was presented as gossip. Occasionally, a so-called film magazine would publish a near-pornographic story, raising the ire of the authorities.[187] Cinema and gossipy reading were inextricably linked as voyeuristic entertainment creating an equivalence between leisure, voyeurism and cinema. By the end of the 1920s, all Gujarati and Marathi newspapers and magazines carried film gossip.[188] Sometimes they got into trouble as when Imperial sued the Gujarati weekly *Cinema and Rangbhumi* for publishing 'disparaging articles about their financial condition and other matters prejudicial to their prestige.'[189] This tendency came full circle with the appearance of gossipy literary magazines with titles containing the word 'cinema' but with very little reference to cinema itself.[190] Cinema denoted a certain exotic ethos of thrills, sex, scandal and romance *tout court*. It was a symbol of its times.

Complementing the tendency towards voyeurism *vis-à-vis* the lives of the stars was the growing acceptance of cinematic iconography as reflecting real life. The Diwali edition of the Gujarati evening paper *Sanj Vartaman* carried regular advertisements for cinema halls and film-equipment companies.[191] Interestingly, the photographs that adorned the pages and covers of successive issues became increasingly cinematic, depicting frozen tableaux of homely comfort, women dressing up, women at play or the meeting of a suit-clad hero on his bicycle with the heroine on her way to college. The cross-over between these photographic styles and those of the film stills in newspapers was apparent. Cinema came to inform styles of deportment in fantasies of social mobility based on modes of changing lifestyles caught in the still photographic frame.

Print and Cinema: Other Modes of Selling

In newspapers and magazines, films were publicised in a variety of ways in addition to the advertisements. Film booklets were essential for the success of films in the silent era. As early silent films with sparse intertitles would have posed challenges of comprehensibility, the booklets with the story in at least three languages – Gujarati, Urdu and English – helped audiences follow the film. Moreover, they were amply illustrated with stills, thereby publicising the attractions of the film. Film personnel were listed at the beginning of the booklet, adding to the publicity for the studio, star,

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[186] *SNP*, 1925.
[187] See the case against *Cinema Bulletin*, a Gujarati weekly paper edited by Tersinh Tulsidas Udeshi, MSA, Home Political Department files, 172/1938. Henceforth HPD files.
The story 'Tales of Dreams' documented the erotic adventures of a masseur named Rangilo.
[188] *EIC*, p.252.
[189] *BC*, 31 Aug., 1928.
[190] For example, *Cinema Yug*, a Gujarati magazine published from Bombay and edited by Ramdas Ruparel.
[191] Information from *Sanj Vartaman*, 1910-1936. Henceforth *SV*.

scenarist and director as well as for the technicians. By the mid-1920s, booklets carried information about forthcoming releases and lists of previous productions. They also became collectors' items, thus strengthening the cinema habit. These ploys added to the excitement about cinema and its personnel and went a long way towards establishing intimacy between industry and audiences. Additionally, they linked up with other modes of film publicity. The Mouj Majah press published booklets as well.[192] Booklets and publicity sheets were also in vogue for imported films. Mohanlal Dave, the leading scenarist of Bombay's silent cinema, started his career as a translator of the publicity material for Pathé imports and went on to write most of Kohinoor's productions.[193] Earlier, films were advertised through lantern slidesprojecting stills and written publicity material before shows or during intervals.[194]

In addition, picture postcards of film stars were circulated. Cigarette packets contained little flip-cards of Hollywood stars. By reinforcing the messages of the films and newspaper advertisements, stills, photographs and postcards widened the field of encounter with the stars and extended their presence in the everyday life of city-dwellers.

Handbills and posters informing patrons about show-timings and other details of the films were placed at key locations in the city. Painted hoardings were placed outside cinema halls. The one designed by Baburao Painter for *Netaji Palkar* was appreciated by Gladstone Solomon, principal of the JJ School of Art, who took his students to see the poster and give them lessons on historical-realist art.[195] The ubiquity of film-publicity material was underscored by a statement made by Kanji Dwarkadas, a member of the Legislative Council, during the debate on the introduction of the Entertainment Duty Bill, 1923: 'All of us who walk in the streets of Bombay notice that placards and other advertisements for the different cinema shows are always placed in the windows of Irani shops, in hotels, in the Taj Mahal hotel, and various other places.'[196] His statement conveys the variety of audiences reached by these publicity campaigns. Salaried office-workers eating in Irani restaurants, foreign tourists at the Taj Mahal hotel and workers staying in various hostels were all canvassed to visit the cinema halls of the city. During the ICC, there were allegations that 'A large proportion of young people form the audiences and illustrated handbills are distributed largely in schools and colleges', thereby spreading the pernicious cinema habit amongst the young.[197]

Cinema posters and stills were an attractive way of advertising films. Indeed, by giving the audience an idea of what to expect inside the hall, posters and stills provided a powerful impetus to the cinema habit. J Stenson, the Entertainment Duty Tax officer, giving evidence at the ICC sessions stated:

> I have noticed many times that boys of 8 or 9 years old loaf about the cinema halls at odd hours of the night. I have personally observed many times that young boys instead of being in bed are always loafing round the theatres looking at the posters and so on, at a time when they should be in bed.[198]

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[192] Wadia (1986), p.45.
[193] *EIC*, p.83.
[194] Jethalal Ratilal Rawal, 'Indian Films and Our Countrymen Abroad', *The Cinema*, Oct.1933, p.60.
[195] *BC*, 9 Apr., 1927.
[196] *Bombay Legislative Council Debates*, 1922, v.7, p.875. Henceforth *Leg. Council Debates*.
[197] *ICCE*, v. I, p.76.
[198] *ICCE*, v. I, p.40.

Sometimes a big street poster encouraging the onlooker to *Watch Your Wife* offended the sensibilities of the genteel citizen.[199] Mobile advertisement was provided by the joker-like figure of the *jamura* who travelled through the streets of Bombay on a bullock-cart carrying a megaphone, reciting racy poetry enunciating the charms of the film and its stars to passers-by and local residents.[200] Exhorting people to watch the films, giving them the date and the venue of the show, he pointed to posters he carried to give the spectators a visual impression of the fare offered inside the hall. In some halls, female dancers were employed to attract the prospective spectator.[201] In this way, cinema spread its tentacles far and wide into the everyday existence of the metropolis beyond the cinema hall. Employing modern, not-so modern and downright traditional modes of advertising, the industry launched an aggressive campaign to find a place of honour in Bombay's life.

II. The Cinema Hall as Site for Advertisement

Selling Cinema Through Incentives

Cinema halls had always held special shows for special occasions, especially during the holiday season. Bombay film companies geared their production schedules towards presenting special films for festive occasions. In 1921, the Empire and the Empress began the popular practice of 'daily change' of films during the Christmas-New Year week.[202] The following year, Globe brought together all the films made on Krishna's life for Janmashtami celebrations.[203] Other special shows included *zenana* shows for women, shows for the poor (*Harishchandra* in 1913),[204] regular matinees on weekends, special early shows for patrons coming from afar and shows to benefit war efforts. Until well into the 1920s, a variety of prizes – cash, jewellery, war-fund bonds and even bicycles – were given away at matinees. In 1918, the first prize for the Great War Loan Lottery at Imperial was one lakh rupees.[205] During the influenza epidemic the same year, the ROH sold a specially-commissioned influenza mixture invented by Professor TK Gajjar (chemist at the Kala Bhavan, Baroda and Phalke's teacher).[206]

Several cinema halls added variety shows consisting of pantomimes, dances, magic shows, skits and acrobatics to their entertainment menu for the evening. At 'variety halls' such as Gaiety, Excelsior, ROH or the Palace of Varieties, cinema was only part of the entertainment. Comic and short films of various kinds were the staple diet of this format. Chaplin's or Linder's on-screen antics found live extension in pantomime shows in the same programme. The first public showing of Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) featured in addition to the film, 'duette and dance' by Miss Irene Delmar, a 'comical sketch' by the McClements, a performance by Alexandroff 'the wonderful foot juggler' and Tip-Top comics.[207] When touring companies such as Bandmann and Company came to the city with their revue shows, cinema shows would be suspended. It was only towards the end of the decade that cinema finally superseded the 'variety-show' format and gained autonomy. This corresponded to the replacement of serials and shorts by feature-length films.

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[199] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.123.
[200] Interview with Narbheram Thakkar.
[201] Interview with Narbheram Thakkar.
[202] *BC*, 24 Dec., 1921.
[203] *BC*, 29 July, 1922, *BC*, 5 Aug., 1922 and *BC*, 12 Aug., 1922.
[204] *BC*, 17 May, 1913.
[205] *BC*, 28 Aug., 1919.
[206] *BC*, 10 Oct., 1918. For Phalke's studentship under Gajjar at Kala Bhavan, see Dharap (1978), p.50.
[207] *BC*, 3 May, 1913.

Dance was by far the most popular form of entertainment in the variety format. Krishna cinema always included a dance by one of its actresses during the interval.[208] The ROH fairy dance sequence was very popular.[209] Bands were employed to accompany films and entertain the audience during reel-change breaks. As early as 1913, an article in the *Bombay Chronicle* spoke of musical accompaniment retreating from theatre into cinemas, cafés, restaurants and hotels.[210] Not only did music set the pace for narrative flow, it was also required to mask the noise of the projector. Imported films were accompanied by atmospheric music according to the mood of the scene. In halls showing Bombay films, harmonium masters and tabla players were employed to provide live music.[211] The film-explainer read out the titles and provided a commentary for the better comprehension of the plot. Film-watching was a more noisy affair in these times. The advertisements repeatedly emphasised the applause generated by particular films to publicise their popularity. Kanji Dwarkadas of the Bombay Vigilance Association avoided halls showing Indian films because 'It is too noisy and the music is not good and it does not give me the relaxation I want.'[212] Audiences could chat and comment on the action, cheer on thrilling action sequences or appreciate a particular dance by the heroine or the vamp. Dwarkadas' colleague, Ida Dickinson, described the crowd's reaction to intimate romantic scenes in imported films thus:

> As soon as they saw scenes like that there used to be catcalls and exclamations and kisses were echoed back.[213]

Another incentive cinema halls offered were complimentary passes to employees, government servants and members of the press. The press had to be kept in hand in order to ensure good reviews in newspapers and magazines.[214] Hotel- and Irani restaurant-owners who agreed to put up posters or keep film handbills were pampered by cinema hall owners with passes in return for the use of their premises.[215] The politics of the complimentary pass led in some circumstances to acrimony and violence. Occasional high-handed behaviour by government officials or policemen and local 'goondas' on account of the management's refusal to issue complimentary passes led to a ruckus and added to cinema's scandalous popularity.[216]

Transportation as Advertisement

In addition to providing entertainment, cinema halls had to consider the practicalities of film-watching. Almost all cinema halls built in the 1920s were built close to transportation points. Cinema Precious advertised its proximity to the Grant Road Tram Terminus as did Majestic to the Girgaum Tram Terminus.[217] The Great Eastern cinema was near the Kalbadevi Tram Terminus.[218] El Dorado sold its two minutes

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[208] 'Miss Layla, Alfredni jaanitaa nati stej upar uttam abhinay sathe naach' (Miss Layla, the famous actress from Alfred Theatre Company will perform high-class acting and dancing on the stage), went the advertisement for Krishna's *Maya Mohini*. *MS*, 12 May, 1928.
[209] Interview with Homi Wadia.
[210] *BC*, 5 June, 1913.
[211] Interview with P Jairaj.
[212] *ICCE*, v. I, p.282
[213] *ICCE*, v. I, p.248.
[214] Evidence given to the Select Committee investigating the Entertainment Duty Tax of 1923. *Leg. Council Debates*, 1922, v.7, p.871-873.
[215] *Leg. Council Debates*, 1922, v.6, p.875.
[216] *ICCE*, v. II, p.154.
[217] *BC*, 6 July, 1918.
[218] *BC*, 27 Jan., 1917.

walking distance from the Grant Road, Foras Road and Tardeo tram junctions as an incentive to spectators.[219] West End arranged for special trams after its night shows.[220] It was the 'Most Central Picture Abode in Bombay'.[221] Indeed, the Grant Road-Lamington Road axis developed as the locus for Bombay cinema precisely because it lay at the hub of all the main transport networks of the city. Similarly, a suburban hall like Kohinoor was advertised as 'The Central Movie Temple of Dadar' right opposite Dadar Railway Station. [222] A respondent at the ICC felt that attendance in the halls was increasing 'according to the facilities of transport' and exhibition of 'more popular films'.[223]

The location of the cinema hall itself thus served as advertisement for the films. Office workers, students or shopkeepers who lived in the suburbs were important components of film audiences. The six p.m. show was timed ideally for this class to catch on the way home. Advertisements manipulated the notion of salaried classes' empty leisure time with nothing to do by exhorting them to spend those hours at the cinema hall. If there was nowhere to go, or one was tired of humdrum daily existence at work and home, there was always the cinema hall. It was a magical universe where one could buy a few hours of scintillating entertainment and perhaps a drink as well. 'An evening spent at Cinema Precious is distinctly an evening spent to recuperate physical and mental weariness. It makes you forget the ravages of influenza in our midst – that the Victoriawallahs in this city have become quite unmanageable – it makes you forget that the problem of the ayahs and the cooks and the Hamals has almost become as serious as the Home Rule Question!!'[224]

Layout as Advertisement

Even in the days of the tent shows, the exhibition site was more than just the tent in which films were seen. It became increasingly elaborate as managers of film companies added amenities to attract audiences. The 1908 season for the Excelsior Cinematograph was announced in advance with the new attractions of the site:

> The Excelsior Cinematograph Pavilion has been greatly improved, one of the features being the Velvet boxes, whose grand appearance will impress the Public of being in one of the Theatres of Europe. The draperies inside and outside of the Pavilion have been executed by Messrs. Fraser and Company of Bombay, and cannot fail to be admired. The grounds are also most beautifully laid out with thousands of coloured electric lights, games, fairy bowers etc., and no trouble has been spared to render the place as comfortable as possible and where the general public can spend a very pleasant hour.The Princess String band will play a choice programme every evening, and the well known pianist Mr. Philip will accompany the Films. Another attraction of the show will be the Buffet under European management.[225]

Cinematograph exhibitors were inventing new rituals for the cinema habit fast developing in the city by invoking the glamour of the theatre. The bally-hoo around cinema exhibition took immediate root as companies vied with each other with

[219] *BC*, 24 Mar., 1917.
[220] *BC*, 24 Feb., 1917.
[221] *BC*, 27 July, 1918.
[222] *BC*, 24 Nov., 1928.
[223] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.49.
[224] *BC*, 6 July, 1918.
[225] *TOI*, 21 Oct., 1908.

elaborate marketing strategies. The Alex Chronophone was accompanied by the Coronation Band.[226] The Excelsior Band, late of the Green Restaurant, was in attendance for the Excelsior shows in 1909.[227] By 1910, 'charming and picturesque gardens' had been laid out – 'a veritable little fairyland in miniature'.[228] A bar had been added. Three categories of seating consisting of sofas, chairs and benches were available and a special box for *purdah* ladies had been added in some cases.[229] Imperial had a roof garden restaurant – the Green Restaurant.[230] An elaborate cinematic world with its own rules and attendant rituals was well in place by 1910 – the year the tent-shows moved into cinema halls.

Similar rituals were formulated for cinema halls as well, only more elaborate. By 1918, Precious with its 'beautiful and illuminated spacious gardens' cost rupees 150,000 to build[231] and was advertised as 'the most popular Pleasure Resort of the Cinema Public'.[232] September 1919 saw the opening of the Empress, owned by the Madans of Calcutta, on the Lamington Road-Foras Road junction, near the Grant Road terminus.[233] It was 'designed to meet the demands of the residents of Malabar Hill and Byculla and will present such an entertainment as is produced by the Excelsior and Empire theatres without the necessity of a long journey to the Fort.'[234]

The advertising campaign for the Empress was a trend-setter. Large advertisements appeared regularly in the newspapers before the opening day. The opening was covered by the *Bombay Chronicle* and in the following weeks the reviews of films at the Empress carried numerous eulogies of the hall. 'Its pleasant gardens, the manner in which the management studies the comfort and tastes of its patrons, the excellence of the films which are shown here and in particular their steadiness, which is attributable to the fixed screen (the only of its type in Bombay).'[235] 'Not a week passes without some improvements being made for the comfort of its patrons… The latest improvement is the institution of new doors for the galleries which is valuable not only for the users of this part of the theatre but also to those in the body of the building, because there is a marked improvement in the ventilation generally.'[236]

Ventilation and the atmosphere inside the hall were important selling-points for theatres. West End, which opened in 1924, stressed that it was the 'airiest and coolest Picture-Hall' in Bombay.[237] Still earlier, an advertisement for Imperial cinema announced that its balconies had been fitted with four extra fans and a special ventilator 'assuring further coolness and comfort'.[238] The state, from 1918 onwards, had been trying to regulate cinema hall architecture and exhibition conditions by insisting on mandatory requirements such as fire-screens, windows, special fire-exits and the replacement of wooden architecture. By the end of the 1920s, state regulation

[226] *TOI*, 24 Oct., 1908.
[227] *TOI*, 27 Oct., 1909.
[228] *TOI*, 27 Oct., 1910.
[229] *TOI*, 30 Oct., 1908.
[230] *BC*, 8 Apr., 1916.
[231] *BC*, 11 May, 1918.
[232] *BC*, 15 May, 1918.
[233] *TOID*, 1927, p.415.
[234] *BC*, 16 Sept., 1919.
[235] *BC*, 11 Oct., 1919.
[236] *BC*, 14 Oct., 1919.
[237] *BC*, 4 Oct., 1919.
[238] *BC*, 21 Apr., 1919.

and the economic necessity for the trade to create an air of respectability transformed film watching in Bombay. The atmosphere in which the cinema performance unfolded became important for strategies of social control and commercial exploitation.

The 'paying public' as patron was being instituted as a category of reference for cinema-hall entrepreneurship through improvement of conditions of film-watching. At West End, the manager personally stood at the door to welcome his upper-class patrons. An employee went around sprinkling rose-water on the spectators seated in the boxes.[239] Even if distinctions were made in terms of comfort for various classes of audience according to their paying power, general conditions for film-viewing substantially improved in the period following the war. Although the balconies benefited from extra fans, the overall improved ventilation benefited everyone in the hall. Gardens, fixed screens and attention to patrons ushered in a new era in which the facilities provided at the hall became important factors in selling films.

From Workshops to Studios: Bombay Film Companies, 1913-1928

The earliest cinema production activity in Bombay was restricted to documentary filmmaking[240] by figures like HS Bhatavdekar.[241] However, in 1910, two residents of Bombay, Ardeshir Hirji Dady and his partner Rustomji Merwanji Mody, were involved in producing features of some kind through their Phoenix Cinematograph Company.[242] They were active under the name of 'Cinema Star of India' in Meerut and Delhi and were listed specifically as 'cinematographic performers' in the list of insolvents published by the Bombay Government.[243] Their activities remain tantalisingly beyond the historian's probing gaze, thus precluding a substantial revision of the received wisdom about the beginnings of Bombay feature-film production by N Chitre/PK Tipnis and DG Phalke.

The earliest film companies were launched by individual entrepreneur-producers who had two major financial options. Either they could borrow capital from businessmen or they could invest the capital generated from their exhibition business. Filmmakers like SN Patankar and DG Phalke depended on the financial backing of city merchants. Technologically too, film production was of an artisanal order with equipment hired or bought from an existing pool of filmmakers. Film personnel were a group of closely-knit people belonging to a limited cultural ambit. Tipnis/Chitre's *Pundalik* was shot with a camera bought by Karandikar and Divekar from Bhatavdekar.[244] Divekar and Karandikar were decorators at Coronation, the hall owned by Chitre. They also worked at the Lakshmi Art Printing Works, once jointly owned by Phalke and Purushottam Mavji.[245] Multi-tasking was the order of the day and films were mostly shot outdoors or on indoor locales that could stand in for sets.[246]

Following the commercial boom of the war, the middling businessmen of Bombay could afford to invest in business outside the manufacturing industry. Indeed,

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[239] Interview with Narbheram Thakkar.
[240] For an account of early short films, see Rangoonwalla (1975), p.20.
[241] *EIC*, p.63.
[242] *BGG*, Pt. II, 1910, p.885.
[243] *BGG*, Pt. II, 1910, p.1194.
[244] Shridhar Shastri, *Bhartiya Film Udyog* (Allahabad, 1969), p.30.
[245] Interview with Virchand Dharamsey.
[246] Interview with P Jairaj.

the period following the stock-exchange dip in the early 1920s may have convinced businessmen to invest in culture rather than in the increasingly unstable markets in cotton and other manufacturing trades. The decade saw an increasing diversion of capital from manufacturing into finance, print, hotelling and entertainment.[247] One such businessman, Mayashankar Bhatt, financed Phalke's Hindustan Film Company based in Nasik and a number of other film companies in the 1920s.

SN Patankar's Patankar-Friends and Company was backed by Dwarkadas Sampat, a Bhatia merchant of Bombay and owner of the Kohinoor mills. Patankar fell out with Sampat over the issue of introducing female performers[248] and went on to form National Film in 1922.[249] In 1919, the year of the financial boom in Bombay, Sampat, in partnership with exhibitor Maneklal Patel from Ahmedabad, founded the largest film company of the 1920s – the Kohinoor Film Company. Starting off as actor and director in his own company, Sampat gathered together a group of talented filmmakers, technicians and artists, enabling him to take up the role of producer. In the wake of the all-India success of Kohinoor films such as *Kala Naag* and *Gul-e-Bakavali*, the exclusive distribution rights were bought up by Bachubhai Bhagubhai, making it the first company to make separate arrangements for film distribution. By 1925, its monthly booking revenue exceeded Rs.50,000.[250] Kohinoor set up a proper studio capable of handling the simultaneous production of multiple films and story-sessions, and conducted aggressive publicity campaigns to build star careers for actresses like Moti, Jamna, Sulochana and Gohar. It was the training ground of almost all major performers, directors and technicians of the silent-film era who made their name in the second half of the 1920s.

The other major figure of film production in Bombay in the early 1920s was Ardeshir Irani, who exemplified the other trajectory of film finance and production. Son of B Ardeshir, one of the earliest cinema dealers in the city, Irani was born into the film business.[251] The Star Film Company, founded in 1920 by two exhibitors – Irani and Abdually Esoofally, a Khoja businessman – and Bhogilal Dave, started the trend of exhibitors becoming big players in the film-production market. Irani and Esoofally had been exhibitors representing the western Indian interests of the Universal Company. In 1914, they acquired the Alexandra and Majestic theatres. Esoofally had traveled extensively in south-east Asia with his tent shows. Star was the product of the transfer of capital gained from one section of the film business into production. The company quickly changed its identity from Star to Majestic in 1923, to Royal Art Studio in 1925 and finally to the more famous Imperial Film in 1926 (opened in partnership with Mohammed Ali and Dawoodji Rangwala). Over time, Imperial lured a large section of the talent groomed at Kohinoor, which began to decline after 1926. Directors like RS Chowdhary, Mohan Bhavnani, Nandlal Jaswantlal and RN Vaidya and stars like Zubeida and Sulochana all came over to Imperial which became famous for its sumptuous costume dramas and Arabian Nights fantasies.[252]

1919 saw the founding of Oriental Film Manufacturing Company at the crossing of Chowpatty Road and French Road by Suchet Singh, a Sikh who had

[247] *RAP*, 1921-22, p.48.
[248] Pandya (1995), p.87.
[249] *EIC*, p.172.
[250] *EIC*, p.126.
[251] Pandya (1995), p.165.
[252] *EIC*, pp.108-109.

studied filmmaking in the US at Vitagraph. Returning to India in 1917, he started Oriental Film with help from Haji Allah Rakhia, the Bohra editor of the landmark Gujarati journal *Vismi Sadi*. His partners were Abu Hasan, Chunilal Munim, Mangaldas Parekh and HM Mehta. He went back to the US in 1919 and returned with actress Dorothy Kingdom and cameraman Baron van Rayvon.[253] The 16 April, 1919 edition of the *Bombay Chronicle* ran an advertisement:

NEW CINEMA INDUSTRY

Wanted

a)Attractive and ambitious acting artists, male and female, of any class (experience not essential) to work with a famous American actress.

b)Energetic and progressive men for Cinema laboratory, camerawork, and assistants under American expert.

Remuneration according to individual merits

WRITE WITH FULL PARTICULARS TO

The Oriental Film Manufacturing Company

80, Esplanade Road

Bombay

(Correspondence strictly confidential)[254]

The replies to the advertisement seemed to have unearthed at least of one of the pioneers of Bombay cinema – Kanjibhai Rathod – later director with Kohinoor and Krishna studios. Rathod completed the films left incomplete at the death of Suchet Singh in 1920 in his capacity as actor and cameraman in the company.[255] Oriental's *Shakuntala* triggered off a debate between Singh and Phalke in the pages of the *Bombay Chronicle* about Singh's use of foreign technicians as opposed to Phalke's definition of *swadeshi* films as films made exclusively by Indian technicians.[256]

Between 1919 and 1924, film production was handled mainly by the companies described above. A few companies which appeared briefly and soon disappeared. Some of them, like Indian Famous Film Limited (probably floated by the Sassoons),[257] Gurudatta Cinematographs Company (a Kutchi Lohana and Bhatia concern)[258] and the Eagle Cinema and Manufacturing Company, Ahmedabad[259] have left no trace of their activities. Bharat Cinema Company which came up in 1921, was run by AP Karandikar and VP Divekar, formerly of Patankar Union and Kohinoor.[260] Swastik Film (1923) and Ashoka Pictures (1925) were the brainchild of Manilal Joshi, a schoolteacher in Bombay and later the leading director with Kohinoor. He was also in charge of Kohinoor's sister concern – Laxmi Pictures (1926) – where he taught the tricks of the trade to RS Chowdhry, BP Misra and Chandulal Shah, all leading

[253] EIC, p.217.
[254] *BC*, 16 Apr., 1919.
[255] *EIC*, p.217.
[256] Interview with Virchand Dharamsey.
[257] *BGG*, Pt. II, 1925, p.210.
[258] *BC*, 14 Aug., 1919.
[259] *BGG*, pt. II, 1922, p.1159.
[260] Information from *LOA*.

directors of the 1920s.[261] These transient companies featured the same old players shuffling around in search of solid ground to settle down. Of the companies opening in this period outside the regular roster of concerns, only the Saurashtra Film Company based in Rajkot, lasted longer than the others. Started in 1923 with the backing of Sir Prabhashankar Pattani, Diwan of Bhavnagar state, it was famous for its Harold Lloyd-type comedies. It utilised the directorial talents of Kanjibhai Rathod and Chimanlal Luhar for a few of its films before folding up in 1929.[262]

Krishna Film Company was established by Maneklal Patel, formerly of Kohinoor. It was established as a diversification of the Krishna Film Laboratory in Bombay. In its day, Krishna had one of the most elaborate studios which it frequently rented to fledgling production companies, especially after 1928 when there was a flurry of new film companies. This studio also benefited from the Kohinoor stable, featuring directors like Harshadrai Mehta and Kanjibhai Rathod. It produced some of the enduring stars of the silent period – Gulab, Ermeline, Nandram and Rampiary. Its historical-thriller *Janjirne Jankare* (1927) was a huge hit and was praised for its production values.[263]

In 1924, Nanubhai Desai joined hands with Bhogilal Dave (of Star Films), Dorabsha Kola and Nowroji Pavri to start the Saraswati Film Company.[264] Its earliest films borrowed personnel from Kohinoor. For example, its 1926 production, *Dulari* was directed by Kohinoor's Manilal Joshi.[265] This studio proved to be the nucleus of the premier stunt-film production company of the silent era – Sharda. Set up in 1925 by Dave and Desai under the direct control of Mayashanker Bhatt (financier of Phalke's films), it made Master Vithal the first male superstar of Bombay cinema. Harshadrai Mehta of Kohinoor and Chimanlal Luhar of Krishna joined hands to become doyens of the stunt film in the early 1930s.[266] Sharda evolved the characteristic rapid-editing style of the stunt film spliced with marvellous special effects of the Arabian Nights-type which remained hallmarks of this genre until the 1950s.[267] The Luhar-Mehta combination became legendary figures of this genre and went on to start their own film company in 1931.[268] Sharda entered a new phase in its film career when it acquired the rights to show its films at Wellington cinema at Dhobi Talao.[269]

In 1926, Begum Fatma from the royal family of Sachin (near Surat) became the first woman director-producer in the Bombay industry. She floated her own company, Fatma Films, and two years later formed the Victoria-Fatma Film Company where she directed most of the films the company produced. She had begun her career on the Urdu stage and made her debut with Irani's Star Films in *Veer Abhimanyu* (1922). Her daughters Sultana, Zubeida and Shahzadi became stars of Bombay cinema.[270] Fatma's interest in cinema went back to its early days when she offered

[261] *EIC*, p.115.
[262] *EIC*, p.209.
[263] *EIC*, p.128.
[264] *EIC*, p.83.
[265] *BC*, 28 Aug.,1926.
[266] *EIC*, p.127.
[267] *EIC*, p.215.
[268] *EIC*, p.146.
[269] Interview with Virchand Dharamsey.
[270] *EIC*, p.95.

Phalke one lakh rupees towards financing his productions after the runaway success of *Lanka Dahan* in 1917.[271]

By 1928, the industry consisted of numerous interrelated concerns that increasingly located themselves in the suburbs, giving the industry a geographically specific location. The suburb of Dadar, with its open spaces and access to location shooting, became the film city of Bombay. Kohinoor and Krishna were located on Naigaum Cross Road and Lady Jamshedji Road respectively.[272] Sharda was in nearby Tardeo.[273] Jagdish was on the estate of Goculdas Pasta on Vincent Road in Dadar.[274] Most of the companies of the post-1925 period were in Dadar. Only Imperial was located at Green Villa, Kennedy Bridge, off Lamington Road.[275]

The studio system had come full circle. The era of the big companies had been modified to accommodate a number of large to middling film companies that attracted a number of personnel, especially from Gujarat, into their fold. The circulation of talent and the regular addition of new studios ensured an increase in the net capital input into the industry. As film production expanded, more and more companies staked their claims in the market. In the earlier phase, demand for films and corresponding film production fluctuated from season to season. Company organisation had been flexible. Performers were hired from film to film and were usually amateurs known personally to the company. By the mid-1920s, this fickle system gave way to the more stable studio system which imposed a certain discipline on these companies. The organisation of actors and technicians into production units with scheduled shooting routines and reputations to defend made studios into well-knit active organisations needing large capital outlays. If in the 1910s, Phalke's films had been made by a makeshift team of personnel on shoe-string budgets, then by 1928, a good production company with complete studio facilities and staff needed an average initial investment of rupees two lakhs while smaller concerns needed at least rupees 50,000.[276] The stakes were higher but more stable for anyone with a long-term interest in the industry.

Distribution of Films in Bombay, 1900-1928

In the early part of the twentieth century, film and equipment could be bought from concerns like B Ardeshir and Company, J Pearson, Asiatic Film Hiring Company, James Manufacturing Company, Standard Trading Agency and KA Shetna.[277] Early distributors like Madan hired 'second-hand films from the continent and America' through the Eastern Express Film Hire Service, London.[278] Michael's Cinematograph Exhibition Company advertised itself as a concern from where 'the Mutoscope may be hired on favourable terms'.[279] Messrs. Bioscope and Company imported cinematograph machines from Rangoon as early as 1903.[280] Coronation Cinematograph were also in business around the same time.[281]

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[271] Dharap (1978), p.60.
[272] Information from *TOID*.
[273] *TOID*, 1929, p.818.
[274] *TOID*, 1931, p.336.
[275] *TOID*, 1928, p.773.
[276] *ICCE*, v. I, p.159.
[277] Information from *TOID*.
[278] *Confidential Proceedings of the Judicial Department*, Government of Bombay, p.388.
[279] *TOI*, Oct.2, 1901.
[280] *BGG*. Pt. II, 1903, p.202.
[281] *BGG*, Pt. II, 1903, p.179.

These commercial companies also sold an assorted variety of goods including electrical machines, cameras, phonograph machines, records, harmoniums and cinematograph machines. As seen above, companies like Soundy and Paris Motor Car Company were responsible for the earliest film shows in Bombay. The Centaur Film Company on Thakurdwar Road, owned by RB and WB Kirtikar, and DR Gokharker, sold films and accessories. RB Kirtikar was, in addition, a clerk in the Mercantile Bank of India.[282] Companies like KA Shetna and Star Film Hiring Service were involved in tent-exhibition of films and hiring of Indian films as well. KA Shetna were agents of the Italian cotton merchants Arturo Boneschi.[283] Star, located in Dhobi Talao, was owned by Abdulally Esoofally and Ardeshir Irani who, as seen above, later founded the Star film company. Irani's father, B Ardeshir, owned the Venus Electrical Company and the Venus Cinema in Parel.[284] The predecessor of Laxmi cinema in Parel may have been a film- or machine-hiring company by the name of Laxmi Cinematograph Company[285] just as the Coronation's predecessor may have been the Coronation Cinematograph Company on Dean Lane.[286] In 1912, its proprietor, RK Vasaikar, sold the company to N Chitre.[287] The same year, Chitre, who worked in the administrative department of the eveninger *Advocate of India*, produced *Pundalik*, the first feature in Bombay.[288] Capital flowed easily across generations between small-time businesses in hiring, exhibition and production of films.

Companies such as the Exclusive and Feature Film Company and Film Serial Company were located in the Native Town and supplied a miscellaneous assortment of films culled from other film companies and rejects or second-run sale films.[289] The evidence of the ICC proceedings indicates a thriving black market in films arriving from the West and even more importantly from Japan and China through Bombay port.[290] They were smuggled in various ways, including in the coat pockets of British exhibitor Girdwood during the war.[291] The induction of the Baby Pathé projector into the market raised the possibilities of smuggling of pornographic films for private consumption in connivance with the 'lowly paid and lowly ranked official' at Customs.[292] Pornographic films were being made in Bombay. In January 1931, the police arrested Beder Miskin, a Sinhalese and partner of B Nahapet and Company, pefurmers of York Building, Bombay, for trafficking in pornographic films. The negatives were kept at the Standard Film Laboratory, Parel managed by DB Divekar (who was arrested as well). Also arrested was camerman Badri Labhuram of Venus Film Company, responsible for shooting the film in his studio in Mahim. The actor Yasin Husein had absconded (later captured) and the actress could not be traced.[293]

The Bombay Gazette occasionally listed 'cinema films' in the inventory of goods lying in warehouses to be auctioned if no claimant appeared. In 1930, three parcels of films, arriving from London on the *Morea* for Indian Pictures Distributors

[282] *BGG*, Pt. II, 1921, p.45.
[283] *BC*, Apr.1, 1919.
[284] *BGG*, Pt. II, 1924, p.1754.
[285] *TOID*, 1913, p.510.
[286] *TOID*, 1913, 508.
[287] *BGG*, Pt. II, 1912, p.1047.
[288] *EIC*, p.243.
[289] Information from *TOID*.
[290] *ICCE*, v. I, p.90.
[291] OIOC, L/PJ/1468, p.233.
[292] *BJP*, 1921, p.423.
[293] *ARBP*, 1931, pp.19-20.

located in Gordhandas Mansion, Girgaum, were lying unclaimed at Customs.[294] The following year, the Gazette advertised two unclaimed cases of photo apparatus and cinema films that had arrived from London on the S. S. *Mantua*. These films were snapped up by smaller film-rental units and travelling companies.[295] It is possible that these smaller units tapped this informal market to sell films to lesser cinema halls which could not afford to buy the more expensive films. FH Katrak and Company on Kalbadevi Street seems to have been doing such film business on the side, in addition to their usual business in film machines and limelight.[296]

In 1917, the Universal Film Manufacturing Company had set up office in the Fort, first under the managership of PK Tipnis, and then under Chunilal Munim, erstwhile partner of the Oriental Film Manufacturing Company.[297] In 1919, Madan Theatre Limited was floated in Calcutta incorporating the Elphinstone Bioscope and Excelsior Theatres Company Limited. The latter was capitalised by the Bombay Building Company which had made enormous profits during the building boom of the 1910s.[298] Madan was the owner of a theatre company, a film company and was the official victualler to the army in almost the whole of north India.[299] It was this last business that provided the base of his capitalistic venture into the world of culture. He owned the Elphinstone Theatre in Calcutta. In addition, he had interests in the phonograph business.[300] In 1907, he had won the rights to distribute and exhibit films on behalf of Pathé and First National and had gone on to become the leading exhibitor in the subcontinent.[301] In 1917, Madan's Far Eastern Films and the Maurice Bandmann Company became part of the Excelsior Cinematograph Syndicate which, in addition to importing films, owned Excelsior and Empire cinemas (and later the Empress). Its manager was the Italian S Colonello, an early tent exhibitor on the Maidan and later owner of the El Dorado cinema-hall.[302] This was the beginning of Madan's long career in the exhibition and distribution business in Bombay.

1919 saw the entry of another major distribution and exhibition company – KD and Brothers – owned by Krishnadas Shah and his brothers. Located in the Goverdhan building on Charni Road, they had branches in Calcutta (Universal Cinema Company and Picture House) and Benares (Coronation Electric Bioscope) and dealt in films, machines, electrical appliances, plants and carbons. In Bombay, they owned Globe and West End cinemas.[303] In 1921, the Indian Famous Players Lasky Film Service Limited opened offices on Government Gate Road, Parel.[304] They rented Lowjee Castle, later the headquarters of numerous Indian film companies.[305] Nothing came of the venture as the government stepped in to freeze the attempts of

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[294] *BGG*, Pt. II, 1930, p.1712.
[295] *BGG*, Pt. II, 1931, p.1841.
[296] Information from *TOID*.
[297] *TOID*, 1917, p.502.
[298] *TOID*, 1916, p.510.
[299] Nawaz Modi, 'Jamshedji Madan – Pioneer of the Film Industry in India' in Nawaz Mody (ed.),*The Parsis in Western India: 1818 to 1920* (Bombay, 1998), p.205.
[300] *EIC*, p.139.
[301] Modi (1998), p.209.
[302] *TOID*, 1917, p.509.
[303] *TOID*, 1918, p.506.
[304] They were a branch of the Famous Players Lasky of the US, home to Cecil B DeMille.
[305] The complex originally belonged to the shipping merchant family of the Wadias. The site is now occupied by the Rajkamal Studios, the company owned by V Shantaram. Earlier it housed Wadia Movietone, famous for its stunt films in the 1930s.

American film companies to set up film production units on Indian soil in the post-war period.[306]

With the establishment of Madan Theatres, KD and Brothers and the offices of Universal Studios in Bombay, the distribution of imported films in India entered global networks of film circulation as opposed to the haphazard film-hiring services of the earlier period. The establishment of distribution networks on a stable contractual basis enabled the exhibition market to expand rapidly. This substantially helped Bombay cinema to establish its own markets in the 1920s by taking over the halls showing imported films. Significantly, the money made by Indian entrepreneurs from distribution of imported films was invested in the exhibition or production of indigenous films.

The market for Bombay films was restricted to the city and some cities of western India. In the rest of the country, the companies negotiated terms with Madan Theatres for the release of their films. This was not easy as Madan was more interested in showing imported fare and favoured his own home productions. In 1928, Madan directly controlled 70 cinemas and had partnerships with 25 more (of the 350 halls in India).[307] Given his government connections, he had near-complete control on the market in north Indian cantonment-towns. Early Bombay films were distributed by the production companies themselves. Occasionally, companies like Mayashanker Thacker (Phalke's films) and KA Shetna (Patankar films) acted as exhibitors. Sometimes production companies distributed films directly through cinema halls. This is evident from the fact that they applied for the film-censorship certificates for films (mainly Kohinoor productions) they showed.[308] By 1925, film companies had entered into exclusive contracts with cinema halls who guaranteed the release of their films. Kohinoor showed its films at Imperial and other companies at Majestic. Krishna had its own hall. When Imperial began production in 1926, it had the advantage of showing its films at Majestic, owned by Ardeshir Irani, the proprietor of the company.[309] By the end of the 1920s, Sharda had entered a contract with Wellington.[310]

It was not until 1925, when Kohinoor established a distribution network, that things began to change for the Bombay companies. 'Sole Distributors' or 'Booking Agents' were contracted by film companies for the exclusive distribution of their products.[311] Distributors also undertook to finance future productions. Ramchandra and Company were sole distributors and financiers for Kohinoor at the time of the ICC.[312] The 'distributor-producer', a category rarely seen in America or Europe, guaranteed an exclusive exhibition niche for each client production company.[313] The guarantee of exhibition over a wide area and capital for future productions provided by the sole distributor permitted a more flexible production schedule.

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[306] OIOC, L/PJ/6/1671, Letter from Lt Col Frank Popham Young to Under-Secretary of State for India, dated 14 May, 1920, p.123.
[307] *ICCE*, v. I, p.337.
[308] From 1921, *BGG* carried a list of films submitted to the censors which gave details about film distributors.
[309] *ICCE*, p.341.
[310] Interview with Virchand Dharamsey.
[311] *ICCE*, v. I, p.561.
[312] *ICCE*, v. I, pp.560-581.
[313] G Ramasheshan, 'The Distributor and his Difficulties', *FL* Puja Special, 1932.

By 1928, production, exhibition and distribution of Bombay films had reached a critical level that allowed the companies to grow into film factories, reaching millions of spectators all over the subcontinent. Production could now be set up on a more stable footing. This was extremely important considering that most Bombay studios ran between three and six copies of a film[314] and fast circulation of the prints through well-oiled distribution was necessary for the company to stay afloat. Financing was mostly in the hands of nervous money-lenders impatient for profits. Many a company ran aground on slow profit generation.[315] However, with the proliferation of the distribution trade, the market could be predicted on the basis of returns from distribution networks. By 1928, there were at least six major film studios in Bombay who could advertise their products in advance as they were able to put up multiple production units. This was apparent from the increasing use of trailers for future productions by the studios through the 1920s (the first documented cases being those for National's *Sati Anjani* and Kohinoor's *Devi Todi* in 1922).[316] Advertisements for forthcoming productions in newspapers and booklets proliferated as well.

The war years and the years that followed had been crucial for the institution of the cinema habit in Bombay. This was acknowledged by the state when the Indian Cinematograph Act of 1918 was promulgated to bring cinema officially under state control. 'The rapid growth in the popularity of cinematograph exhibitions and in the number of bioscope theatres in India has drawn our attention to the inadequacy of the existing law' said the government.[317] The Evans Report of 1921 also underlined the need to harness cinema for state propaganda.[318] Little came of these efforts since the state was more interested in educating the masses through films than entertaining them. The Act was used mainly to curb the bad influence of American cinema on the Indian mind arising out of the filmic depiction of foolhardy and immoral behaviour by whites such as 'people drinking and dancing and jumping on tables and engaging in low class vulgarities' and 'ladies dancing on the table and kicking their legs over the gentlemen's heads'.[319] On the other hand, the government realised the cinema's revenue potential and imposed the Entertainment Duty Tax in 1923 to fund compulsory primary education. Racing, gambling and cinema were the prime targets of the tax. In addition, the Municipality taxed posters and public advertisements.[320] Urban lifestyles now had to be paid for. The fact that returns from Bombay films had already, in 1923, outstripped those from imported films indicates the rapid growth of the industry in the post-war period. Bombay cinema had come of age.

[314] *ICCE*, v. I, p.189.
[315] *ICCE*, v. I, p.237.
[316] *BGG*, pt. I, 1922, pp.2683-2684.
[317] *Confidential Proceedings of the Home (Political) Department*, Government of Bombay, 1917, p.4351.
[318] For the Evans Report, see OIOC, L/PJ/6/1747.
[319] *ICCE*, v. I, p.44.
[320] *ICCE*, v. I, p.2.

Chapter Two

The Development of Genres and Stars in Bombay Cinema, 1921-1928

The establishment of regular exhibition of Bombay films, described in the last chapter, went a long way towards providing the basic infrastructure for the development of the industry in the 1920s. The first part of this chapter will chart the elaboration of filmic genres, a phenomenon that was symptomatic of the growing complexity of studio production regimes. The Bombay cinema had finally established itself as an urban cultural institution. The establishment of the social film as a viable generic option for the studios signalled the entry of a middle-class audience for Bombay films, a turning point in the industry's history.

The development of the social film genre went hand-in-hand with the elaboration of a star order. The second part of the chapter will attempt to delineate how genres and the star order were formulated culminating when actresses such as Sulochana and Gohar became the industry's first stars following successful experiments with the social-romance film. Genre and star together finally established an autonomous Bombay cinematic cultural world. In order to understand the mechanism that linked genre to star, this section focuses on how films were advertised, criticised and sold. An analysis of the discourse on the social film elucidates parallel discourses on acting, genre and the social evaluation of cinema as a cultural institution that underlay the star phenomenon.

Generic Shifts in Bombay Films, 1921-1928

Mythologicals and Historicals, 1921-1925

The earliest films of the 1920s were mythologicals, released on the occasion of religious festivals. These films were mostly episodic, their narratives relying on the fact that their audience was already familiar with the stories. The attraction lay in the 'reality effect' that only the projected moving image could provide, and in the grandeur of mythological characters made even grander by the 'realness' of the imagery. A 'real' royal procession shot in a princely state doubled for such an event in the mythological narrative. The documentary quality of the projected moving image made special effects more real than those shown on the stage. Although Parsi theatre had attained great proficiency in miracle effects, stage effects could not hide their mechanical basis. Human agency was all too apparent. In the cinema, miracles appeared self-generated, making them more 'miraculous' and therefore more 'real'. Star Film Company's *The Supreme Sacrifice of Bhishma* (1922) focused on the special effects of the bed of arrows on which the Kuru patriarch of the *Mahabharata* lay for the last eight days of the Great War.[1]

Another important feature of the films made in this period was their predominantly Gujarati cultural ethos. Although the stories chosen to be presented on-screen had a general appeal in most of the subcontinent, most films belonged recognisably to the Gujarati cultural world. Stories such as *Rukmini Haran* (Kohinoor, 1921), *Markandeya Avatar* (National, 1922) or the *Doom of the Yadavas* (National, 1923) had specific appeal for Gujarati audiences. Even an apparently neutral film on a celebrated episode of the *puranas* like Kohinoor's *Sati Anusuya* dealt with 'the birth of Shree Dutte' or Dattatreya, a particularly important deity in western India. In

[1] The Indian title for the film was *Bhishma Baan Shayyaa* (Bhishma's Bed of Arrows). *BC*, 3 Jan., 1923.

addition, the costumes of these films were distinctively Gujarati. The protagonist of Star's *Raja Parikshit* (1922) was a prototypical well-built Gujarati youth – moustachioed, turbaned and clad in a silk shirt and dhoti.[2] The Rana Pratap of *Yashodevi* (Royal Art Studio, 1925) looked more like a Gujarati merchant than the valorous armour-clad prototype invented later.[3] Another indication of the 'Gujaratiness' of a film was the inclusion of such distinctive cultural performances as the *garba* or *fuldi* dance and swing scenes. A *garba* sequence was a safe crowd-puller.[4] The Gujarati-Vaishnava ethos of film culture was reflected in the large number of films based on the life of Krishna and his *lila* made in this period.

Descriptions of these films indicate that they depicted mythological stories in the lived cultural experience of the people of Bombay. Dwarkadas Sampat used filmed *garbas* performed by the women of his Gujarati community. Scenes were filmed on swings, a familiar feature of Gujarati merchant homes. Sampat also hired theatre companies to perform songs inside the cinema hall as the words appeared on the screen.[5] The performers belonged to known circuits of theatre performers or amateur players. Real jewels and costly garments were lent to the performers while essaying divine roles.[6] The gods had to lead recognisably grand lives in order to be godly.

The atmosphere created in these films was one of an intimate cultural proximity between Gujarati communal life and the scenes depicted on screen. Films were watched in cinema halls located at the peripheries of the Gujarati merchant and middle-class neighbourhoods – Bhuleshwar and Girgaum. The lives of people, especially women, in these districts revolved around endless rituals of worship and pilgrimage to the various temples in this territory. The performative aspects of daily life fed into performances of texts on the screen. The earliest mythological films thus presented the Gujarati merchant's point of view as patron of Gujarati religion and culture. They showed off the cultural and economic might of the merchant who sustained the elaborate religiosity that largely defined Bombay's urban life in the early decades of the twentieth century. Merchants often had the words of popular stage songs printed alongside religious incantations on the borders of the fabric produced at their cotton mills.[7] In such a cinema, the culture of Gujarat and the merchant's economic power were the main stars of the show.

By 1923, religious cinema had extended to the lives of the saint-figures of the medieval *bhakti* tradition, albeit mainly those popular in western India. Films based on the lives of Tukaram, Sakhubai, Mirabai, Pundalik and Narsinh became part of the industry's repertoire. Devotional films based on the lives of local Gujarati saints such as *Devi Todi* (Kohinoor, 1922)[8] or *Shri Ranchhodrai* – 'the great devotee of Gujarat' (Patankar, 1922)[9] formed another popular genre. Films about devotees and religious leaders of the Nath *sampraday* like *Bhartrihari* (National, 1923),[10] *Raja Gopichand*

[2] *BC*, 16 Sept., 1922.
[3] Publicity pamphlet, *Yashodevi*,1922.
[4] Interview with Ushakant Mehta.
[5] Mehta (1993), p.27.
[6] BD Garga, *So Many Cinemas* (Bombay, 1996), pp.39-40.
[7] The lyrics of songs from plays featuring the celebrated actor Jayashankar Sundari were printed on the borders of *dhotis* produced at the Bombay cotton mills.
[8] *BC*, 14 Oct., 1922.
[9] *BC*, 22 July, 1922.
[10] *BC*, 27 Jan., 1923

(Bharat Film, 1921)[11] and *Guru Machhendranath* (National, 1922)[12] proliferated as well, replete with magic and miracle that allowed filmmakers to display spectacular special effects. Devotion and renunciation at the feet of the Lord were running motifs of these films. The all-India popularity of the saint tales of Mirabai or the Nath yogis certainly helped spread the market for Bombay films outside western India. In a period when films were hard to come by, the audience would settle for anything of a devotional nature.

The shift to the lives of saintly figures indicates a move from myth towards history. The setting of the films in a particular regional cultural ethos emphasised the historicity of the narratives. Film companies became increasingly aware of cinema's potential to educate audiences about their own regional histories. The first Gujarati historical romance to be released in Bombay was National Film Company's *Ranakdevi–Ra Khengar*. Released at the Majestic theatre on September 19, 1923, it was touted as 'The First Historical Masterpiece'.[13] 'See the brightest Jewel of the annals of Kathiawar', went the advertisement, adding that the film was a 'brilliant example of how surprisingly screen can depict what history records'. It was also 'a historical record of the Rajpoots' which depicted 'beautifully finished in gorgeous settings – wonderfully interesting intrigues – the climax reaching when a mother allows her children to be mercilessly murdered and burns herself for her honour'. Melodramatic realism intersected with history to provide rousing fare for the audiences: 'a picture that will lift you right out of your seat – that will give you an irresistible impulse to cheer'.

The advertisement quoted above admirably sums up the affective values aspired to by the Rajput historical-romance genre that became fairly common after 1925. Action, acts of piety, court intrigues and melodramatic scenarios were staples of this genre. 1923 saw the release of five historical romances – *Sati Virmati* or *Jaydev Parmar* (National),[14] *Minal Devi* (Kohinoor),[15] *Karma Devi* (Kohinoor),[16] *Champraj Hada* (Star),[17] and *Vanraj Chavdo* (National)[18] – all set in Kathiawar. Most films dealt with ideal regional 'patriots' who gave up their lives in the defence of the realm and personal honour. In some ways, these films did not differ much from mythological films. They incorporated a fair degree of the supernatural. They dealt with ideal characters similar to *pauranic* personalities or gods and goddesses who had undergone similar trajectories of deification leaving only a thin dividing line between goddesses, *pauranic* heroines, saints and historical *sati*s. Yet these stories were deemed more real as they were part of 'recorded' history. The eclipse of the mythological, around 1923, from the top productions of the day indicates a significant shift towards screen realism in the industry.

Stunt Films and Socials, 1925-1928

The Thief of Baghdad starring Douglas Fairbanks was released in Bombay in 1924. It continued to play to packed houses in some or other part of the city for the next ten years. The film's amazing success was due its appeal across classes and for all age

[11] *BC*, 28 Nov., 1921.
[12] BC, 5 Mar., 1923. The film was acclaimed by critics and ran for two weeks at Majestic.
[13] *BC*, 15 Sept., 1923.
[14] *BC*, 23 June, 1923.
[15] *BGG*, Pt. I, Sept.1923, p.1963.
[16] *BC*, 15 Oct., 1923.
[17] *BC*, 17 Nov., 1923.
[18] *BGG*, Pt. I, Apr.1924, p.717.

and social groups. The film's Islamicate[19] decor and Fairbanks' bare-bodied valour undoubtedly helped establish familiarity with the ethos of the genre. The *Thief...* was quickly followed by another Fairbanks vehicle, *The Mark of Zorro*, this time establishing the mysterious masked rider as a favourite cinematic legend. Again, the Texan-Mexican locales were assimilable to Indian frames of reference.

The Fairbanks films were a culmination of the stunt-film genre that had been so popular in the 1910s. For Bombay cinema, the potential of stunt films was clearly discernible in the growing taste for action-packed historical and mythological films. *Veer Ahir* (Kohinoor, 1924),[20] a Gujarati-Rajput historical, was touted as 'a Thrilling and Sensational Picture highly appreciated by Bombay Public'. The stress was more on the thrills and sensations of a pastoral stunt film than on its historicity. Even *Kala Naag*, Bombay's first urban social film, was advertised as a film with 'every reel full of stunts and thrills'.[21]

The focal point of the stunt film was the horse-riding hero who vanquished his rivals through his physical skills. The stunt films produced in this period dealt with palace intrigues in fictively historicised kingdoms, and generally involved a battle between good and evil in which the stunt hero triumphed after initial reverses. A romantic interest in set-piece situations would be thrown in for the titillation of the audience. The main attraction of the film was the series of chases and confrontations between the hero's party and the villains. Captures, escapes and fight sequences in dangerous situations were the staple of this genre. Added to this were the charms of the heroine and her erotic dances.

The first film to evoke the world of stunt stars in princely garb was Krishna Film Company's *Krishna Kumar/Sacho Hakdar* (1925).[22] The advertisement for the film ran: 'Concealed under a Black Garb…Krishna Kumar'. The pun on the company's name and the hero's complexion (*krishna*-black) is noteworthy. Also, Maneklal Patel, owner of Shri Krishna Film Company and author of film scenarios, used the pseudonym Krishna Kumar as a scenarist.[23] The Indian title, which translated as 'The Rightful Heir' was advertised as – 'AT LAST…The Real Right Owner to the Throne Comes Out of the Mask – the black curtain'.[24] Reclaiming one's rightful patrimony remained a running motif throughout the stunt film genre's career. Repeated at the Krishna Theatre in November of the same year (earlier shows were at the Majestic), the film's title this time read 'The Mysterious Outlaw'.[25] Taken together, the 'black prince' and the 'mysterious outlaw' created an Indian version of Zorro. Laxmi Picture's *Black Thief*, shown at the Imperial Theatre in October 1925, produced the first stunt star of the Bombay industry – Raja Sandow.

In 1926, Sharda Film Company established itself as the stunt-film specialist. It began the year at Krishna Theatre with *Vasant Bala*, featuring Miss Jones, the first

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[19] The term 'Islamicate' was coined by Marshall GS Hodgson to denote 'a *culture*, centred on a lettered tradition, which has been historically distinctive of Islamdom of *society*, and which has been naturally shared in by both Muslims and non-Muslims who participate at all fully in the society of Islamdom'. See introduction of Marshal GS Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, v. I*: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago, 1974), p.58.
[20] *BC*, 17 Jan., 1925.
[21] *BC*, 5 Jan., 1924.
[22] *BC*, 21 Mar., 1925.
[23] *EIC*, p.127.
[24] *BC*, 14 Mar., 1925.
[25] *BC*, 21 Nov., 1925.

woman stunt heroine, as Vasant Bala.[26] The film was touted as 'Sharda Film Company's historical masterpiece', underlining the connection between the stunt film and the historical romance. Krishna's *The Victim*, released in June 1926, featured Nandram Pahelwan, another durable stunt star of the time. He was dubbed the 'Indian Eddie Polo' after the Hollywood stunt serial star who had been was tremendously popular with audiences. Made by Harshad Mehta and cameraman Chimanlal Luhar, *The Victim* was 'an interesting episode from the Mughal History – of the time of the Great Akbar'.[27] The advertisement for Imperial's *The Lion of Mewar*/*Diwan Bhamasha* stressed the thrills, mysteries, masks and fights in its 'Beautiful Grand Historical Picture'.[28] The very next month, the same studio produced *The Midnight Rider* depicting 'the most Chivalrous Episodes from the History of Rajputana'. The main attractions of this film were 'The Charming Mountain Scenes, Natural Views and Horsemanship of excellent type and other Warlike Scenes rarely witnessed in Indian films'.[29]

In these films, history was superseded by stunts and special effects and from now on historical films added stunt sequences in order to sell. A 'historical atmosphere' was invoked through costume and decor, while values of valour, patriotism and feminine chastity were worked back into the historical past through the codification of a fictive 'Rajput' world. The stunt films, as much as the historical films, contributed to the public imagination of what was Rajput about India's past. By the end of 1926, this genre had found a firm footing in the industry. It had produced two stars as well – Raja Sandow and Nandram. The year ended with Krishna's *The Veiled Enemy*/*Behind the Veil* featuring Nandram and Ermeline, the latter a stunt star who went on to become the most famous vamp of the silent screen.[30] Apart from stunt kings, brave ladies like Jilloo fought tigers in Royal Art Studio's *King of Forest*, probably a copy of the Tarzan films.[31] The presence of female stunt actresses indicates the extent to which the Bombay stunt films had captured the audiences' imagination. Now Sharda Films and the Mehta-Luhar team were durable production units willing to experiment with the form and market it aggressively over the coming years.

In the following years, the stunt genre dominated Bombay's production output. Some of the landmark films of this period belong to this genre, including the classic *Janjirne Jankare* (Krishna, 1927). Adapted from Champsi Udeshi's novel, serialised in the popular journal *Navchetan* in 1926, it was especially recommended for its action sequences and battle scenes.[32] 1927 saw the rise of stunt star Master Vithal, who acted in four stunt films – *Swadesh Sewa*, *Kala Pahad*, *Asuri Lalsa* and *Bhedi Trishul* – that year.[33] From then on he became the unchallenged stunt king of Bombay films with a legendary association with Sharda Studio. Children would stop him on the road to ask him to display his muscles to check if they were real.[34] His films which came to signify the acme of cosmopolitan urbane entertainment provided Bombay cinema's major commercial breakthrough in north India where the market

[26] *BC*, 3 Mar., 1926.
[27] *BC*, 5 June, 1926.
[28] BC, 16 Oct., 1926.
[29] *BC*, 27 Nov., 1926.
[30] *BC*, 25 Dec., 1926.
[31] *BC*, 26 June, 1926.
[32] *EIC*, p.250.
[33] *EIC*, p.236.
[34] Interview with P Jairaj.

had been dominated by the monopolistic control of Madan Theatres Limited of Calcutta.

Alongside stunt films, 'social' films (frequently referred to as 'socials') were produced with increasing frequency in this period. By 1928, the term encompassed a variety of film-types – social-intrigue, detective, social-satire, social-problem and social-romance films.

The social-intrigue film inaugurated by *Kala Naag* in 1924 was carried on through films like *Baap Kamai* (Krishna, 1925), *Fankdo Fituri* (Kohinoor, 1925), *Kulinkanta* (Kohinoor, 1925), *Mojili Mumbai* (Kohinoor, 1925), *Mumbai-ni Mohini* (Saraswati, 1925) all centred on the scandalous lifestyles of the rich people of Bombay. A dancing-girl (who seduced a rich man or a dissolute son or both), a swindler, a young wife and her lover, a crafty detective and a gang of villains were the hallmarks of this genre. *Mumbai-ni Mohini* had a *sheth* being poisoned by his wife, Mohini, and boasted a kidnapping scene in which a girl was chloroformed on the new Marine Parade.[35] *Kulinkanta* was based on the sensational Bawla murder case which had rocked Bombay the same year.[36] The advertisement for the film went 'Bawla khunno aabehoob chitaar batavnaaru chitrapat' (the film giving a complete depiction of the Bawla murder).[37] The newspapers had run specially expedited news items as the trial of the case unfolded. With a dissolute princeling, a dancing girl and a scheming minister, the case proved ideal for the kind of tabloid journalism that the cinema carried on through the social intrigue film.

Like *Kulinkanta*, films such as *Kala Naag* and *Manorama* (Kohinoor, 1924) were based on real-life incidents. *Kala Naag* was apparently modelled on the life of the leading underworld boss of the times.[38] The early socials, for example *Baap Kamai* (Krishna, 1925) and *Mojili Mumbai* (Kohinoor, 1925), featured a dancer named Roshanara apparently based on a real-life cabaret artist of the same name.[39] She might have been the one performing the Delhi Gypsy Dance at the ROH referred to in Chapter One. For the latter film, 'Miss Yekbal as Roshanara' was the only performer listed in the advertisement in the *Chronicle*, emphasising Roshanara's attractions in the film as well as in Mojili (Swinging) Mumbai's cultural life.[40] Similarly, films were made to expose the wrong-doings of religious community heads. The film *Dharmi Dhutaro* (Sharda, 1926) was banned by the censors for displaying an irreverent attitude towards holy men, especially when a scandal about the lascivious practices of the head of the Vallabha sect had hit the city in 1925.[41] The scandal generated two short-lived newspapers with large circulations – *Pol* and *Pol-ni Pol* – representing opposing viewpoints.[42] The advertisement for a repeat run of Kohinoor's *Vismi Sadi* promised 'each and every *Pol* of Bright Bombay – Civil Marriage – Social Reform – Unfaithful Trusty' making use of a word that seems to have been in fashion that year.[43]

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[35] *BGG*, Apr. 1925, p.1180.
[36] *EIC*, p.247.
[37] *MS*, 30 Oct., 1925.
[38] Mehta (1993), p.21.
[39] *EIC*, p.248.
[40] *BC*, 30 May, 1925.
[41] MSA, HPD files, 45/1926.
[42] *SNP*, 1925.
[43] *BC*, 20 Nov., 1926.

Early social-intrigue films were widely released. Not only were they shown in the up-market halls of Grant Road and Lamington Road, they were also released alongside stunt films in halls in working class areas. They were full of stunts and thrills of detection, very much in line with the intrigue atmosphere of the stunt films in which the prince, more often than not, was a detective, an agent of social justice. The masked rider theme corresponded to the role of the detective working incognito in the dens of vice and villains. Social-intrigue films juxtaposed modern and traditional spaces within the narrative frame of a single film, minimising the distance between the historical-stunt and the social-intrigue film. *Sadhus* and diabolical feudal minions clashed with the modern detective in an urban social context. *Fankdo Fituri* (Kohinoor, 1925) directed by Homi Master, boasted 'a charming heiress, a good looking but villainous doctor, a timid lover, a crafty detective, a singing girl, a Nawab in his dotage and a dancing woman from the gutter'.[44]

The social-intrigue film was closely allied to two other types of social films produced in the latter half of the 1920s – the social-satire and the detective film. The social-intrigue films were aimed at exposing the scandalous and corrupt lifestyles of the privileged and the sinister happenings in this world. The social-satire on the other hand lampooned the foibles of this class in a humorous and melodramatic manner. *Vismi Sadi*, made in 1924, was the first important social-satire film. With an exploitative mill-owner in collusion with the British as its central character, it showed up the absurdities of a class mindlessly copying Western manners and lifestyles.[45] Kohinoor repeated the formula in *Nanad Bhojai* (1927), this time showing up the absurdities of reformist households in Surat, who failed to live up to their ideals in their own lives.[46] Based on a true story, this film was part of Bombay cinema's attempt to attain a reputation for socially responsible filmmaking. Social-satire films retained cinema's relationship with real-life Bombay. Censorship reports frequently required companies to change the names of characters and their official titles in films to avoid too close a correspondence between cinema and city. For example, in one case, Rao Bahadur Bulakhi Ram, J.P. was changed to Bulaki Ram Inamdar. In another case the 'son of a High Court Judge' had to be changed to 'son of a High Court Vakil' in order to avoid caricaturing 'a certain gentleman in Bombay'.[47] The title of the social satire *Mumbai-ni Sethani* (Majestic, 1924) was the same as that of a popular series of anthologised Gujarati satirical poems that lampooned the Bombay *nouveau riche* businessmen's wives.[48] *The Flirting Wife*/*Vilasikanta* (Social Pictures Corporation, 1927), a social-satire probably inspired by Hollywood films of the New York Beautiful People that had flooded Bombay in those years, ran to packed houses in the Majestic theatre and was 'seen and admired by 300000 Bombaites'.[49] Krishna's *Society Butterfly* (1926) featuring Gulab was another social-satire set against the backdrop of a princely state.[50]

The detective film, on the other hand, was not so easily detachable from the social-intrigue film, except that in the former the detective was central attraction of

[44] *EIC*, p.247.
[45] *EIC*, p.245.
[46] *EIC*, p.250.
[47] *ICCE*, v. I, p.103.
[48] At least three sets of anthologies entitled *Mumbai-ni Sethani* were published from Surat, Ahmedabad and Nadiad under the authorship of Joitaram Bhagvandas, Gordhanlal Shah and Ambalal Nrsinghlal Shah.
[49] *BC*, 26 Mar., 1927.
[50] *BC*, 16 Oct., 1926.

the narrative. *Kulinkanta*, for example, had a detective as one of its main protagonists, as had the sequel to *Kala Naag – The Return of Kala Naag* (Kohinoor, 1927). The first film advertised as a detective drama was Premier Photoplay's *Justice*. It involved the oft-used story of a swindler plotting to take illegal charge of property 'worth lacs'[51] and promised to expose the game of 'cigar-holding badmashes and villainous Punjabi jyotishis'.[52] The advertisement for the 1926 Sharda film *Jangal-ni Jadibuti* featuring Vithal invited the spectator to play detective. It mimicked a police poster: 'WANTED… By the Police A Confirmed Convict for the charges of Murder, Forgeries, Kidnapping etc.' and asked the spectator 'Who is the Villain of Sharda Film Company's Social Drama *Jangal-ni Jadibuti*'.[53] Significantly, it was billed as a 'social drama', indicating the flexibility of the social-film genre that included a wide range of themes.

The social-problem and the social-romance film were closely related sub-genres that centred around the travails of women and questions of social reform and change. The social-problem film usually dealt with the problems of drink, gambling and promiscuity affecting the ideal Indian family, especially in times of economic hardship. A scene in the novel *Pootli: A Story of Life in Bombay* has Thriti, sister of Jal, an inveterate gambler, saying 'Gambling is too bad; it leads to nothing but disaster and ruin. I wish, mamma, you had seen the gambler's sad fate in the cinematograph show the other day. I actually cried to see the misery of his poor wife and girl who was exactly my age'.[54] Although the story is placed in the age of the cinematograph, the 1910s, the scene could as easily be true of the 1920s when the middle classes had become active consumers of Bombay social cinema. *Gunsundari* (Kohinoor, 1927) tackled the problems of an overworked husband and his housewifely spouse.[55] Fed up with the daily drudgery of his life, the husband takes up with a dancing girl, forcing his wife to come out of her seclusion. Similar films made in this period include Royal Art Studio's *Gentleman Loafer* (1926) in which the dancing girl Gulab and her accomplice Durmad received 'just punishment' for destroying a family.[56]

The social romance film dealt with marriage across caste, class and religious boundaries. *Telephone-ni Taruni* (Kohinoor, 1926) dealt with the difficulties of a romance between a Christian telephone-operator and a Hindu lawyer. It also referred to a collectivisation movement amongst farmers probably inspired by events in Russia[57] and the Co-operation Movement in India. Kohinoor produced yet another social romance in 1926 featuring Sulochana – *The Typist Girl*/*Why I Became a Christian* – this time on romance thwarted by the caste system.[58]

Bhaneli Bhamini made by Kohinoor in 1927 combined the social problem and social romance sub-genres to warn the younger generation against venereal disease as a consequence of dalliances with dancing girls that would result in the 'ruin of happy romances and families'.[59] Gohar and Raja Sandow together gave a lecture on the

[51] *BC*, 3 Oct., 1925.
[52] *MS*, 3 Oct., 1925.
[53] *BC*, 5 June, 1926.
[54] Ardeshir FJ Chinoy and Dinbai AF Chinoy, *Pootli: A Story of Life in Bombay* (London, 1913), p.61.
[55] *EIC*, p.250.
[56] *BC*, 22 May, 1926.
[57] *EIC*, p.250.
[58] *BC*, 1 Nov., 1926.
[59] *BC*, 2 Apr., 1927.

dangers of forbidden pleasures. *Keshavkant*, *BA* (Krishna, 1927) carried a sensational ad-line: '"CHASTITY" vs "UNCHASTITY" Who Won?'.[60] In the middle of 1927, Kohinoor presented a set of films entitled *Gunsundari or Why Husbands Go Astray*,[61] and *Surat-no Sahukar or Why Sons Go Astray*.[62] Imperial released *The Nurse* which depicted the 'tragic end of blind speculation… a forcible marriage etc. etc.'[63] Kohinoor's *Pleasure Mad* revealed a 'thrilling plot of one disappointed in love and mixed himself in races' recapitulating familiar themes of these sub-genres.[64]

For all their emphasis on literary realism, the social films did not necessitate a fundamental shift in the civic character of cinema. Most films were situated in recognisable locales. *Kala Naag* was shot in some of the seedier parts of Bombay. NG Devare at Kohinoor pioneered location shooting in *Telephone-ni Taruni* by shooting portions of the film in the Grant Road telephone exchange.[65] The same film had scenes set in Marine Lines that the censors ordered to be renamed 'Marina Lines'.[66] Kohinoor was ordered to delete references to municipal corporators going to the opening of the real-life Vihar lake in yet another Sulochana social romance – *The Typist Girl*.[67] The censors' cuts for *Vande Mataram Ashram* referred to a scene 'in a by-lane leading up to Victoria Gardens'.[68] Sharda was ordered to cut out 'references to Sankli Street as rendezvous of villain' from its *Jangal-ni Jadibuti* (1926).[69] Sankli Street, located in the Grant Road area, was notorious through the 1920s for fights between gangs. It was also suspected of harbouring prostitutes, a suspicion strengthened by the fact that the street was home to unwed couples living together in rented accomodation.[70] *Gamdeni Gori* (1927) featured 'electric trains, motor cars and buses, the giant wheel, cinemas and theatres',[71] bringing out the self-reflexive realism of the early social films that enthusiastically recorded the birth of the metropolis that they grew alongside. Another film, Sharda's *Nakali Rani* (1927) set within the film industry and seems to have dealt mostly with Muslim performers.[72] Most films dealt with contemporary issues as a newspaper would. In fact, the relationship between the newspaper and the cinema was never as close as in this period. Films were firmly located in the public debates of the day. As a new genre, the social film needed to cash in on the most sensational issues of the day reported in the newspapers.

Studio, Star and Audience: The Politics of Class and Sexuality in Early Bombay Cinema

Increased profits, growing demand for films, increasing production and the consequent influx of personnel meant that the industry was now able to enforce stable production practices like the studio system. The more visible the industry became through increased production and publicity, the more respectable it became in the public eye. Films could now be appreciated as significant cultural products. The

[60] *BC*, 12 May, 1927.
[61] *BC*, 18 June, 1927.
[62] *BC*, 3 Sept., 1927.
[63] *BC*, 3 Sept., 1927.
[64] *BC*, 5 Nov., 1927.
[65] *EIC*, p.85.
[66] *BGG*, Pt. I, 1926, p.1843.
[67] *BGG*, Pt. I, 1927, p.90.
[68] MSA, HPD files, 45/1927.
[69] *BGG*, Pt. I (Extraordinary), 1926, p.1431.
[70] Report on Sankli Street in *Praja Mitra and Parsi*, 2 May, 1920 in MSA, JD files, 150 Pt. II/1920.
[71] *EIC*, p.250.
[72] *BGG*, Pt. I, 1927, p.682.

intensification of the star effect in these years is an indicator of the heightened sense of glamour that was coming to be attached to the industry. The industry was now seen as a professional institution capable of generating jobs and offering public fame and fortune.

Genre, star and budget decided the target audience for a particular film. Social films and Super productions were sold at higher prices to exhibitors and were aimed at the more prosperous segments of the population. According to one distributor, 'At times some producers in order to widely advertise any of their jewel productions give a trade show'.[73] The higher the price of a film, the better its chances of success among the moneyed and leisured and therefore more 'respectable' classes.[74] The publicity surrounding such films ensured that the largest possible audience watched them. The pivot of this process was the superstar, whose popularity increasingly transcended class barriers.

I. The Bombay-Gujarati Cinema, c.1925

The Bombay-Gujarati cinema of the 1920s had multiple registers of address. The difference could be seen in the attitudes of two pioneers of Gujarati films towards their own filmic practices. As mentioned earlier, Kohinoor started with a partnership between Dwarkadas Sampat, a cotton-mill owner, and Maneklal Patel, an entrepreneur in film exhibition from Ahmedabad (earlier he was a clerk in the office of a Marwari businessman).[75] In 1924, Maneklal Patel split from Kohinoor to launch his own Krishna Film Company. The cause for this split is unknown, but it seems that Maneklal Patel was a shrewd businessman with a keener eye towards populist commercial practices than Sampat.[76]

Studios, Films and Audiences

Despite the ascendancy of the social, much of the production output of all studios was still dedicated to traditional adventure narratives set in the Gujarat princely states. They were shot in states like Palanpur and Baroda.[77] Film shooting seems to have been a routine affair in Baroda since the state charged fixed rates from the companies.[78] Most of these films dealt with social problems in the states and were considered socials. The Gujarati middle classes had one foot in the princely states and the other in Bombay. The literature and cinema of this period reflected the dual identity of this class and the general socio-economic dialectic of the time that brought countryside and city into a dynamic and intimate relationship. This has to be related to the Non-Cooperation Movement's effect on the Gujarat hinterland, as well as to the growing economic and educational opportunities in Bombay during this decade.[79] The 1920s saw a great migration of the Gujarati intelligentsia from the hinterland into Bombay, where they led a Gujarati cultural renaissance. Newspapers, journals, magazines, theatres and the cinema were taken over by young artists from various parts of Gujarat. School textbooks now featured edifying tales of saintly and heroic lives of regional cultural stars. *Savitri* was 'successful with the Hindus' since 'Most of

[73] *ICCE*, v. I, p.565.
[74] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.16.
[75] Pandya (1995), p.74.
[76] Mehta (1993), p.44.
[77] *ICCE*, v. I, p.175.
[78] *ICCE*, v. I. p.176.
[79] For an account of the transformation of hinterland politics due to Non-Cooperation, see Siddhartha Raychaudhuri, 'Colonialism, Indigenous Elites and the Transformation of Cities in the Non-Western World: Ahmedabad (Western India), 1890-1947, *MAS*, v.35, no.3, July 2001.

the educated people knew the whole story because it was a text taught in every school here some years ago.'[80]

It is not surprising that most of the films made in this period were aimed at defining the Kathiawari historical identity. They were part of the cultural movement amongst the Gujaratis to define a heroic past for themselves. Kathiawar, with its numerous Rajput principalities, was the repository of this heroic past. Novels, serialised in the leading journals of the times, stories, plays and films endeavoured to construct the reformed Gujarati as the heir to a glorious Rajput past. The cinema was the ideal vehicle for mass politics and populist context of this project. Its ability to catch the pageant and glory of history in the flesh was unique. Several upwardly-mobile castes claimed *kshatriya* status. A predominantly mercantile group like the Bhatias now claimed: 'aapan ke kshatri rahe, or jaat nahi koe' (we are *kshatriya*s and we belong to no other *jaati*).[81] Sampat himself was a Bhatia as was a large section of Bombay's merchant community. Such upwardly-mobile groups made seemingly paradoxical moves to insinuate themselves into higher caste categories by reforming themselves and at the same time project themselves as the elite of the modernising states. Reform of maladministration in princely states through pacification of society and bureaucratic competence were the prime aims of princely state reformers.

Kohinoor's 1925 film, *Hirji Kamdar* borrowed directly from a real-life incident of an attack on a cloth merchant by the minions of a princely state. The advertisement for the film translated as 'the *zulum* (oppression) of the state police on the *Kamdar* (treasurer), the shooting of villagers and all this happening while the *raja* was away enjoying a trip abroad'.[82] A subsequent advertisement for the same film warned the viewers of the descent of villainous agents of the *rajwadas* (princely states) upon Bombay.[83] Sharda's *Chalta Purja* (1929), was banned because it was seen as denigrating the princely states.[84] Majestic's *Babar Deva* (1924), based on the recent exploits of the eponymous dacoit, 'The famous *baharvatiya* of Kheda district and Vadodara province',[85] was banned as well.[86] The depiction of the realities of the princely states also served as a metaphor for the perceived injustices of the British administration. The stereotypical presentation of subject matter allowed for metaphorical slippage at multiple levels.

Yet there were significant differences in the manner in which studios approached the traditional corpus of narratives. Kohinoor by and large eschewed populist tendencies and projected a cosmopolitan image mixed with a respect towards tradition. It strove to project the image of a self-sufficient pioneering company. Its traditional fare was presented as emphatically political. A film like *Hirji Kamdar* was advertised as a comment on contemporary political conditions. Sampat himself had raised the ire of the colonial government by presenting a thinly-veiled allegory of Gandhian politics in *Bhakta Vidur* in 1921. He himself appeared as Vidur, clad in *khadi* and courting arrest at the hands of tyrannical rulers.[87] In contrast, Krishna

[80] *ICCE*, v. III, p.151.
[81] *Shri Bhatiani Kulkatha* (Bombay, 1927), p.1.
[82] *MS*, 17 Oct., 1925.
[83] *MS*, 24 Oct., 1925.
[84] *LOA*, p.142.
[85] Ranchhodbhai Dahyabhai Motibhai Brahmabhatta, *Babar Deva Dohro*, Vatav, 1926. This book gives the life of Babar Deva in form of couplets.
[86] *BGG*, Pt. I, 1925, p.1181.
[87] *EIC*, p.244.

seldom politicised its presentations directly. Its traditional fare depended more on the exotic, the erotic and the adventurous. Sharda, the premier stunt-film producers, showed their films at Krishna.[88] But even in this department, Kohinoor seems to have triumphed, helped as it was by the technical expertise of directors like Master and Joshi. Even though Krishna specialised in folkloric films of magic and adventure, it was Kohinoor's *Gul-e-Bakavali* that won critical acclaim. The studio image of Kohinoor was that of an autarkic production house that ran business as a benign patriarchal concern and trained its own artists from scratch.

In a sense, the cinema of the early 1920s exemplified the dictum of 'Patriotism with Profit'. Entertainment, politics and commerce were melded together in the historical and historical stunt films. The populist context of civic life made the 1920s a 'noisy' period in Bombay's history. The aim of cultural life was to mobilise mass support for one cause or another. The overwhelmingly large entry of people into the world of mass media and politics has to be taken into account when the heroic role of the cinema is considered. All classes were fascinated by the new medium, and films in this period mixed history, romance and thrills to appeal to a diffuse audience yet to be distinguished by neat cultural habits. The mix of the historical, the populist and the titillatory in these films reflected their fragmented audience. If lower-middle class clerks revelled in populist historical discourses as an affirmation of a glorious Gujarati past, students felt that on-screen heroics foretold their role in India's future. Punters at the race-course identified with the stunt chases on horseback. If working-class audiences preferred the charm of the dancing girls and the thrills of the stunts, they were also partaking of a sense of worth as barebodied industrial workers, wrestling with machines and fast-moving vehicular traffic outside the hall. Most workers were migrants from villages where the regal way of life, professed even by petty chieftains or landholders, made itself felt in numerous ways. It goes without saying that all classes had an interest in the amatory aspects of the films.

With the arrival of the socials, Krishna balanced its populist filmmaking and film-exhibition practices by commissioning films based on 'respectable' Gujarati literature. The early films advertised the names of the authors of novels on which films were based even before starting to list the names of directors and stars. As early as 1922, Gopalji Delvadakar was listed in the advertisement for *Devi Todi*.[89] Ashoka Pictures' *Prithvi Vallabh* (1924) was advertised as being 'Adapted from the famous novel of Mr. Kanhyalal Munshi BA, LLB, Advocate'.[90] Literary fame in the Gujarati cultural world was used to legitimise cinematic ventures. Krishna regularised cinematic adaptations of middle-brow Gujarati literature and commissioned scriptwriters from amongst the Gujarati intelligentsia, including the hugely popular *ghazal* poet Shaida and the novelist Narayan Vissanji Thakkar.[91] At Kohinoor, Sampat's attitude towards modern literary tastes seems to have been remarkably conservative. None of Kohinoor's productions were based on the new literary classics of the day and almost all Kohinoor films were scripted by Mohanlal Dave (although *Gunsundari* was supposed to have been 'borrowed' from 'a very popular Gujarati novel').[92] Sampat also disapproved of practices like live dance shows during intervals and reel-changes. On the other hand, Maneklal Patel at Krishna used 'progressive'

[88] Information from *BC*.
[89] *BC*, 14 Oct., 1922.
[90] *BC*, 12 July, 1924.
[91] The 1925 Krishna production of *Baap Kamai* was based on a novel by Shaida. *EIC*, p.247.
[92] *ICCE*, v. I, p.217.

literature *and* live dance shows. Gulab, the main star at Krishna, regularly appeared on the cinema-hall stage as did a long line of dancers.[93] Patel had a finger on the pulse of the changing times and audience demands and had no hesitation in catering to the populist tendencies. Krishna's studio image was that of a commercial concern willing to pay a price for the best in the market.

The Krishna films spoke of reform in a conservative tone, keeping its films centred around domestic dramas or tales of religion, magic and adventure. This was in keeping with the transformation of the Gujarati cultural world in the 1920s which saw an explosion in popular literature aimed at all classes. One segment of literary products was aimed at a lower middle class that was developing a taste for high culture while remaining traditionally orthodox. The other segment was aimed at a more genteel bourgeois audience. However, the same themes of Gujarati history, folklore, religion and social reform were taken up by both categories of literature. Magazines aimed at a lower-middle class audience imitated the formulae of what was considered 'high literature' – mainly historical and social reform literature in Bengali, Hindi and Marathi – with the stories given a sensational twist and, more often than not, a dollop of sexual titillation in the name of romance. Detective fiction and sensationalised versions of the Arabian Nights and folkloric tales were immensely popular.

However, at the level of consumption, the difference was not so well-marked. If KM Munshi and Dhumketu wrote for an upper-middle class audience, NV Thakkar, a polymath as famous for his serious fiction as for his titillating tales of historic romance and social reform, wrote for a heterogeneous audience encompassing most of the literate classes. Indeed, an advertisement for Sharda's production of *Hirasundari* (1928) based on his novel of the same name made a special note that 'This production will surely please people of all tastes because it is written by the famous Gujarati author Mr. Thakur'.[94] He was also an essayist, writing extensively on Gujarati culture. In addition, Thakkar wrote marriage guides for young people.[95] He was a translator of Reynolds who, as seen in Chapter One, provided much of the impetus for the gothic sensibilities of the social-intrigue drama so popular in the Bombay literary and film-production regime of the 1920s.[96] He was also suspected of having contributed titillatory historic-romantic tales to Gujarati magazines under pseudonyms.[97]

His interest in the theatre and cinema world was evident from his 1917 novel – *Chudelno Vanso athva Ek Natini Atmakatha* (The Back of a Witch or The Autobiography of an Actress) that depicted the journey of an ordinary married woman from Gujarat to a north Indian bordello. His preface to the novel assumed an ironic tone towards reform by claiming that his work sought to reveal the dreadful part of cities that were now considered as *Devnagar* (City of Gods) or *Nandanvan* (The Garden of Pleasure).[98] He was also proprietor of the magazine *Natak Cinema and Pakhand Prakash* (Theatre Cinema and Exposé of Hypocrisy), edited by Bhimshankar

[93] *BC*, 21 Aug., 1926.
[94] *BC*, 18 Feb., 1928.
[95] He wrote a marriage guide called *Dampatisastra* in the 1920s.
[96] His translations were published by Mahadev Jagushte – the leading publishing concern in Ahmedabad.
[97] See MSA, HPD files, 74/1936 for the case of *Himmate Hammir athva Hathodina so ane Hathodano evi* published in *Navi Roshni* under the name of Rangoonno Rasselas.
[98] Narayan Vissanji Thakkar, *Chudelno Vanso athva Ek Natini Atmakatha* (Bombay, 1917) serialised in daily *The Gujarati*, 1913-1914.

Bhuralal Sharma.[99] Through such works, Thakkar positioned himself in a cultural world where Reynolds, reform, scandal, sensational journalism and the social-intrigue cinema existed side-by-side in the *Devnagar* of Bombay. Amongst Thakkar's stories that were filmed were *Asuri Lalsa* (Sharda, 1927), *Anarkali* (Imperial, 1928), *Chandrahas* (Krishna, 1928), *Hirasundari* (Sharda, 1928), *Maya-na Rang* (Suvarna, 1928) and *Saundarya Sura* (Sharda, 1928).[100] Although he does not find a place of honour in subsequent histories of Gujarati literature, he was undoubtedly one of the most popular and important figures of the modern Gujarati literature movement in the 1920s. His liminal position between elite and popular cultures can be considered symbolic of most cultural production by the Gujarati elite. Thus Krishna and Thakkar exemplified what might best be described as the middle-brow Gujarati cultural universe. Reading a middle-brow Gujarati novel of the 1920s with its film still-like dramatic illustrations and formulaic dialogues set in stereotypical situations would have been very akin to watching a social film with long intertitled dialogues.[101]

The 1920s, a period of transition for the discourse on women, threw up many contradictions. On the one hand, the new classes genuinely felt the need for reform. On the other, the reform of fundamental rites of passage like marriage demanded an overhauling of the entire traditional social edifice of these groups. Krishna's attitude was apparent from the ambiguous language of the advertisement for their 1929 production of *All for Money*:

You Cry Out

Religion in Danger

But

Hon. VJ Patel Congratulated the Government for Successfully Pushing the SHARADA BILL

Though the Assembly was of opinion that India would be benefited thereby

Hon'ble Patel's Opinion Right or Wrong?

Hear To-day Bombay's Criticism in Your Favourite

In Your Favourite Krishna's Newest and Best Social Picture

All for Money[102]

The Sharda Bill raised the marriageable age of girls from twelve to fourteen. The emancipation of women was a vexed question that polarised social discourse throughout the decade in multiple ways.

Krishna tapped an emerging market amongst the lower middle classes and the working classes of Bombay. Krishna even launched a new studio called the Gujarat Film Company in Dadar to produce films dealing exclusively with Gujarati cultural subjects.[103] Its films were singled out by observers at the ICC as catering to spectators of a class described as 'literate but not quite a cultured one'.[104] Or in the words of another observer they were 'educated Indians who have not taken English education

[99] *SNP*, 1931.
[100] Information from *LOA*.
[101] For example, the multi-part novel *Kusum ane Kundan* by Haribhai Dalpatram Patel published from Ahmedabad in 1917.
[102] *BC*, 23 Nov., 1929.
[103] Pandya (1995), p.76.
[104] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.11.

but still are well connected with the public affairs'.[105] JD Khandhadia, editor of the women's magazine *Gunsundari*, giving evidence at the ICC Bombay sessions, characterised Krishna's audience, consisting of clerks, shopkeepers, petty traders and white-collared workers, as 'semi-literate'.[106] Indeed, Khandhadia's evidence indicates the liminal space occupied by Krishna with respect to the spatial emplotment of class in Bombay. When asked about the halls in the Girgaum area, he made a clear distinction between Girgaum, where Krishna was located, and Girgaum Back Road, where he lived: 'That is in Girgaum, but Girgaum Back Road is distant from that cinema'. Further, he denied any connection between the locality of a hall and the audience it attracted:

> How can you say that people of the same locality go and visit the same cinema. It does not depend upon residence in that locality; nor that the people there only frequent the same cinema. The cinema may attract audiences from other localities too. It depends upon the picture.[107]

Khandhadia's evidence revealed the disquiet felt by the entrenched middle classes about a cinema hall like Krishna, the films shown there and the class that patronised its shows. But he had to admit that even in such halls at least five percent of the audience consisted of 'westernised people'.[108]

By contrast, another respondent considered the audience at Imperial and Majestic – two other halls exclusively showing Bombay films – as 'cultured'.[109] According to Kanji Dwarkadas, a filmmaker and regular cinema-goer, the cinema halls in the heart of the city – the Native Town – drew a mix of 'the upper and lower middle classes'.[110] Similarly, another observer attested to the presence of English-educated Indians in halls showing Bombay films. Not only this, 'Such Hindus, when they go with their families, go to see Indian films only'.[111] Kohinoor films released at Imperial were thus aimed at the more cosmopolitan middle class.

Kohinoor prided itself on its pioneering filmmaking and its introduction of path-breaking films in every genre of the period. It boasted 'progressive' filmmakers like Manilal Joshi and Kanjibhai Rathod (considered the first backward caste director in Bombay cinema history). It introduced radical genres: it was the first to introduce urban scenes in films and also the first to make films about social problems modelled on Hollywood films. Films like *Kala Naag*, *Telephone-ni Taruni*, *Typist Girl*, *Mumbai-ni Sethani* and *Kulinkanta* are landmarks in the history of cosmopolitan social films of the silent era. Their sophisticated production values were their selling point as was the fact that they broached daring social issues such as inter-religious romance and the changing work condition of women.

The fact that both companies were making successful films at the same time reflects the size of the film market and the emerging possibilities of niche marketing in the wake of the simultaneous entry of middle-class audiences as well as a large section of the working classes. Critical social distinctions were being mapped on to the connection between cinema hall and particular film companies or film types. But the simultaneous success of their films was also due to the overlapping audience

[105] *ICCE*, v. I, p.561.
[106] *ICCE*, v. I, p.557.
[107] *ICCE*, v. I, p.557
[108] *ICCE*, v. I, p.557.
[109] *ICCE*, v. I, p.414.
[110] *ICCE*, v. I, p.259.
[111] *ICCE*, v. I, p.560-561.

segments who watched all kinds of films. Even though halls and films had distinctive appeals for particular social segments, the reality was a picture of overlapping audience segments rather than watertight divisions. Himansu Rai's 1925 film, *Prem Sanyas*, considered an upper-class international production, was released at Krishna where it did good business amongst all classes.[112] In the struggle for markets, studios could not afford to alienate their mainstay, the lower middle class.

Another important factor conjoining the audiences for these films was the overarching world of the Gujarati and Parsi theatres whose following cut across class lines. Both Kohinoor and Krishna made films of the type that had antecedents in the multi-generic performative world of the Parsi theatre. Although Kohinoor's *Gul-e-Bakavali* and *Vismi Sadi* belonged to different genres, both were derived in style and content from the Arabian Nights fantasy and the social satire respectively of the Parsi stage. The same could be said of Krishna, although it definitely aimed its films towards a Hindu Gujarati audience and based itself more on the Hindu Gujarati stage. Yet stylistically it had much to borrow from the Parsi stage in its stunt and fantasy films. The already-formulated heterogeneous audience for the Parsi theatre contributed substantially to the heterogeneity of Bombay film audiences.

In a city like Bombay, 'anyone who could afford' watched films.[113] An estimated 50 percent of the city's population went to the cinemas.[114] Upwardly-mobile young people like JD Khandhadia might have chosen to stay away from Krishna, but the ICC evidence indicates a heterogeneous class mix in every cinema hall. Even by Khandhadia's estimate, 55 percent of the audience in all halls showing Indian films was semi-literate.[115] Given his conservative attitude towards what constituted a 'literate' individual, this figure might have been inflated, but even then the semi-literate audiences were crucial to the industry's calculations. The same film might have appealed to a variety of spectators. Tribhuvannath Muttoo, President of the Independent Film Traders Association, observed that in Gujarat, social films were popular even amongst the lower classes.[116] The period around 1925 saw the growth of a generalised Bombay film culture and much of the audience was heterogeneous and overlapping. A person like SB Thorat, President of the District Local Board, Ahmadnagar, displayed an admirable knowledge about the leading lights of the industry when he listed personnel from all studios amongst those whose names he was familiar with.[117]

It needs to be emphasised that there was a tendency amongst respondents to downplay the percentage of educated Indians visiting halls showing Bombay films.[118] The reasons for this could range from ignorance to confusion over literacy and class categories to wilful obfuscation in order to downplay the disreputable cinema habit amongst educated Indians. But on the whole respondents ratified that Bombay films had a large educated-Indian spectatorship who were overcoming their 'instinctive prejudice' against 'cinema as an expensive luxury which does not conduce to good morals.'[119] Kanji Dwarkadas was categorical in his statement that 'The illiterate

[112] Information from *BC*.
[113] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.11.
[114] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.49.
[115] *ICCE*, v. I, p.549.
[116] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.12.
[117] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.54.
[118] *ICCE*, v. I, p. 276.
[119] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.91.

classes also visit the cinema, but not yet in the same proportion as the educated classes.'[120] Notably, according to Khandhadia, 25 percent of the audience in such halls were women, a fact not surprising since these halls ran a mix of mythological and historical films that were considered family entertainment.[121] The substantial presence of women in cinemas showing Bombay films was substantiated by others at the ICC as well.[122] Almost all films were advertised in the papers as family entertainment. But it is also possible that cinema-watching was becoming a fashionable activity for young Indian couples and here the socials with their romantic themes might have been the favoured genre. There is evidence that theatre-going by young couples was prevalent enough in the 1920s to be satirised and frowned upon by orthodoxy as corrupting the frugal *baniya* young.[123] It is possible that such habits were extended to the cinema.

Audience niches were more projected than real but did have some significance. Although even Sampat's films advertised the beauty of the heroines and their dances in titillating terms (Kohinoor also produced a dance series in four sections),[124] and at least once used stage dancing alongside a film in 1922 (Kohinoor actress Lena Valentine danced at Imperial while *Ajamil* was being shown there),[125] the companies and their studios attempted discreet niche-marketing by claiming subtle distinctions. Kohinoor, through its socials and distinctly political take on traditional fare, was appealing to progressive audiences, especially the younger generation. Its reputation for employing progressive filmmakers and producing technically better films added to its reputation. The coming of the socials called for stricter delineation of the social agenda of studios. Here, Kohinoor definitely aimed for a more cosmopolitan image by producing urbane thrillers and social romances while Krishna stuck to social problem and social-satire films. Added to this was its critical distance from practices such as live dance shows which were vital for Bombay cinema's popularity and were adopted by most film companies. In a period obsessed with respectability *vis-à-vis* the public presence of women, live stage-dancing in cinema halls made a significant difference to the audience profiles of Krishna and Kohinoor. But the crucial distinction emerged through their differential manipulation of star appeal. Kohinoor's extraordinary stable of respectable female actresses went a long way towards establishing it as the leading studio of the day. The growing differentiation between studio products seems to have been borne out in practice. Gurmukh Singh Chawla of Amritsar opined to the ICC that 'Religious films by Madan and Krishna have been successes from a business stand-point but one cannot speak very highly of them.' Their reputations, according to him, were founded on 'ill deserved popularity'.[126]

The Stars

It may be argued that studios created distinct self-images through differential recruitment of performers. Underlying this phenomenon was the transformation of the Gujarati cultural universe that was bringing Bombay and the Gujarat hinterland into close proximity. Performing acts travelling outwards from the hinterland converged

[120] *ICCE*, v. I, p.259.
[121] *ICCE*, v. I, p.549.
[122] *ICCE*, v. I, p.113.
[123] For example, *Fashionable Jamano yane Doobti Nauka* (Nadiad, 1923).
[124] *BGG*, Pt. I, 1922, p.1799.
[125] *BC*, 7 Oct., 1922.
[126] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.91.

on cities like Surat and Ahmedabad in addition to Bombay. Stage-dancing and wrestling in public arenas, which possessed a special prestige from their association with court and traditional elite patronage, were particularly popular. The 1920s were a period of increasing commercialisation and consequent stratification in these activities. Public displays of dance and wrestling[127] reached all the way down to the working and lower classes. These performances emulated, albeit ironically, the culture of the courts and the rich.

The fame of performers was usually bound to the context of performance and it was only the hectic commercial traffic in culture in this period that made it possible for dancers from disparate cultural contexts such as Zubeida and Gulab to make it simultaneously to the Bombay screen from Surat. Central to this traffic was Bombay cinema's need to seek out all classes of performers to people the culturally differentiated yet burgeoning demand for films. If courtesans had formerly refused to act in films, considering the theatre and the *kotha* as superior cultural media, the socio-cultural forces of the mid-1920s dissolved such snobbery. The enormous expansion in the entertainment market relocated cultural divisions. Traditional entertainment media like wrestling and stage-dancing were now located in dynamic interaction with a separate representational sphere – cinema. Markets, railways and urbanisation brought diverse performers from different fields and cultural levels into a shared competitive field on the silver screen.

Despite the democratising force exerted by the commercialisation of culture, there were significant differences between the career trajectories of these actresses. Zubeida belonged to the ruling family of Sachin, near Surat.[128] She was the daughter of one of the junior *begums* of the Nawab, whilst Gulab was a relatively anonymous but talented dancer in the same city. It is no accident that Zubeida landed up in Kohinoor and Gulab in Krishna. Zubeida was more 'classically' beautiful than Gulab whose charms were considered more rustic. Moreover, Zubeida stood for a cultured background of high courtesanhood, whereas Gulab was an ordinary dancing girl who had been arrested in Surat for singing nationalist *kajli*s in honour of Gandhi.[129] Even their names signified the differences in their cultural backgrounds – Zubeida, a more classical Persianate name than Gulab, which was a generic name for dancing girls. Thus Zubeida fitted into the more urbane Kohinoor, whereas Gulab went to the more provincial Krishna studio. Gulab's nickname of 'Gaurangi'[130] connected her to traditional notions of beauty based on the charms of a goddess (Gauri), cows and village belles, a fact emphasised in her numerous rustic roles. Both Zubeida and Gulab were symbolic carriers of the laicisation of the courtly cultures of Gujarat through the stage, the gramophone and the screen. In Bombay, class determined where they went and what they did. Krishna with its populist practices picked on Gulab who was suitable for its conservative tales but could still evoke a sophisticated charm in love scenes and dance sequences. So she travelled from the provincial stage to the cinema and from there back to the stage, but this time as a live performer Bombay's Krishna Theatre.

Kohinoor's 'sophisticated' stars such as Zubeida, Raja Sandow, Gohar and Sulochana, who replaced an earlier and more traditional star order of Khalil, M oti,

[127] On the commercialistion of wrestling in the 1920s, see Joseph S Alter, *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India* (Berkeley, 1992), pp.76-88.
[128] *EIC*, p.241.
[129] Pandya (1995), p.82.
[130] Pandya (1995), p.82.

Yakbal and Jamna, lent Kohinoor considerable respectability. The star system cultivated at Kohinoor, with the 'right' body-types and looks, gave the studio the legitimacy to innovate. Kohinoor could align its filmic practices with Hollywood cinema not just because it had sophisticated directors like Homi Master, but also because its stars could exude sophistication. Films produced with appropriate stars earned fortune and fame for the studio.

II. Past the Bombay-Gujarati Cinema, 1925-1928

When change struck the Bombay-Gujarati cinema, it signalled the beginning of its end. The eclipse of Kohinoor between 1926 and 1928 marked the end of an era. Significantly, this period also saw the waning of Krishna's fortunes. For the historian, Kohinoor's eclectic practices are an invaluable gauge to the changing patterns of audience formation in this decade. With its demise, its technicians, film-makers and stars were released into the market and went on to fuel the next generation of films produced in Bombay. The most significant development was the bifurcation of the cosmopolitan-progressive and conservative-progressive elements of the studio into the Imperial and Ranjit studios respectively. Sulochana and the directors RS Chowdhary, BP Misra and Mohan Bhavnani moved to Imperial, while Gohar and Chandulal Shah formed Ranjit. Stunt film production passed on to Sharda Studio which employed Vithal along with the directors Chimanlal Luhar, BSc and Harshadrai Mehta.

Films, Studios and Audiences

In the second half of the 1920s, Kohinoor was straining towards two new kinds of audience. Through films such as *Kala Naag* (a modern stunt film) and *Gul-e-Bakavali* (an Oriental fantasy), it was trying to reach an all-India audience and became the first company to succeed in doing so. Indeed, many observers at the ICC felt that the social film was the only way to address an all-India audience. Mohan Bhavnani, erstwhile director at Kohinoor and now at Imperial said: 'The portraying of social pictures will bring the different provinces together.'[131] For the new generation of filmmakers, the historical films were too region-specific, while social films about general human problems could solve the problem of regional specificity. Implicit in their argument was the belief that socials would attract classes who would be willing to spend more on cinema. They belonged to a generation which was realising that the only collective audience segment that cut across boundaries of ethnicity, regionality and religiosity and could be addressed as a homogeneous group was the newly emerging bourgeoisie, especially of the younger generation.

Indeed, this was the golden period of the social film. Of 58 films made in 1925, 24 were socials compared to 30 films of the costume, stunt and historical types. The following year, 25 socials were made out of a total of 71 films. In 1927, out of 64 films, 31 were socials and 28 were of the costume, stunt and historical variety; and the same number were made out of a total of 79 the following year.[132] In these years, the socials kept pace with the traditional fare of costume, stunt and historical dramas. The situation was to be reversed dramatically from 1929.

The hope of the Bombay industry was the new generation of young students, professionals, office-workers and workers. Students, in this period of political and social change, formed a class by themselves outside the realm of budgeted economies and familial circumstances. During the proceedings of the ICC, J Stenson, Supervisor,

[131] *ICCE*, v. I, p.180.
[132] Figures calculated on the basis of the filmography in *LOA*.

Bombay Entertainment Duty Tax, noted that a 'great proportion of the audience consists of adolescents between the age of 14 and 25.'[133] In Bombay, 75 percent of students from Wilson College went to the cinemas between once to thrice a week. The audience in the Fort area halls consisted of 'schoolboys, college students and young persons from offices'.[134] The trend seems to have been even more pronounced in large towns and the *mofussil* where the proportion of students and adolescents attending cinemas seems to have been very large indeed.[135] In Poona, the majority of the literate audience consisted of students.[136] In Banaras, the majority of the audience consisted of 'a large number of young men from the class of *raises*' and a 'large number of students'.[137] Halls in the city offered special-rate tickets for schoolboys.[138] The younger population had disposable time and money to spend and were marked by a homogeneity of cultural habits gained through a standardised educational experience.

The films in this period fell into two broad categories, both aimed at distinct audiences with an all-India presence. In the first place were stunt and adventure films, now produced with increasing frequency that took care of lower and lower-middle class audiences. The Sharda stunt films starring Master Vithal were the main fare shown in towns like Kanpur.[139] The other kind of films made with increasing regularity in this period were socials, usually centred around the persona of a star like Sulochana. Although aimed at the educated classes, the stars drew in audiences of all classes. Krishna continued with a mix of fantasy, stunt and conservative-social films. *Ex Husband,* a 1928 production of Gujarat Studios, Krishna's subsidiary concern for making films aimed at Gujarati audiences, was modelled on 'story based on High Hindu Principles'.[140]

Sulochana's audiences increasingly consisted of the north Indian educated young and the working classes, in addition to a general following in the big cities. Their tastes were honed by watching Hollywood romance-adventure films. Spectatorial preferences had shifted from adventure serials to 'moral films and dramas'.[141] Audience fantasies were increasingly shaped by Hollywood heroines like Norma Talmadge, Norma Shearer and Gloria Swanson. They watched Sulochana's romantic-adventure films as an extension of their Hollywood habit. In advertisements in north Indian newspapers, Sulochana was the unquestioned star of the show.[142] In Bombay, she was the 'Star of Stars'.[143]

The new youthful educated class set the agenda for social mobility. The assistant editor of the *Indian National Herald* felt that people were taking to non-traditional sartorial styles and even though the change in fashion was an exception, it proved the 'rule that was coming along'.[144] A filmmaker of the younger generation like Indulal Yajnik felt that on-screen kissing was natural for love scenes and would be necessary for realist cinema, a view that acknowledged the presence of erotic

[133] *ICCE*, v. I, p.36.
[134] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.47.
[135] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.11.
[136] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.16.
[137] *ICCE*, v. IV, p118.
[138] *Aaj*, 18 Oct., 1930.
[139] Information from the newspaper *Vartaman* published from Kanpur for the period 1927 to 1929.
[140] *BC*, 28 Jan., 1928.
[141] *ICCE*, v. I, p.14.
[142] *Aaj*, 18 Oct., 1930.
[143] *BC*, 7 Mar., 1928.
[144] *ICCE*, v. I, p.542.

behaviour in everyday Indian life and would have hardly found any takers amongst conservatives.[145] He resented the fact that kissing scenes were deleted from Indian films when they were freely allowed in imported ones.[146] Indeed, Sulochana's films were characterised by her erotic presence and her legendary love scenes with D Bilimoria.[147]

The Stars

What the ICC observers did not emphasise was the importance of the star effect in constructing the social film as a viable commercial option for Bombay cinema. An all-India audience for social films had been formulated around the star persona of Sulochana and to a lesser extent, that of Gohar. Stars in this period stood for particular social values and were supposed to symbolise distinctive visions of society and audience configurations. They were expected to have a particular 'effect' on society and the film market. While both Sulochana and Gohar appealed to middle-class audiences, their distinctive appeals indicate differences in the 'Sulochana effect' and the 'Gohar effect' which in turn reflect complex patterns of interaction between gender, class and representational practices. Sulochana played Christian working girls and cosmopolitan upper-class characters in her films. Her first major social film – *Telephone-ni Taruni* – was touted as a 'long awaited cosmopolitan picture'.[148] After her stint with social films at Kohinoor, she became the star of a number of costume romance adventure films (usually featuring Dinshaw Bilimoria) through which she developed an glamorous exotic persona. Gohar, on the other hand, essayed a stable set of roles consisting of historical figures and middle-class housewives who were educated but did not revolt against the family system. The characters she portrayed even chose their romantic partners but never demanded economic independence.

Gohar represented the modernised traditional values of the conservative class-oriented films of Krishna and the conservative wing of Kohinoor. She started her career at Krishna in a bit role in *Baap Kamai*.[149] Her persona was of a mythological and historical heroine imaged through the social film. She played historical characters from Rajput history all through her career alongside her famed title roles in *Gunsundari* and *Bhaneli Bhamini* (Kohinoor, 1927). Indeed, she played the secondary role of a dutiful wife in the Sulochana starrer *Telephone-ni Taruni*.[150] In contrast, Sulochana's notable stint in historical cinema was restricted to the classic role of Anarkali, made by Imperial in response to Himansu Rai's Indo-German production of *Shiraz* and more importantly, the Punjabi capital-based production of the same story – *The Loves of a Mughal Prince*.[151] It is significant that Sulochana played a Muslim woman in her only historical film of repute, which was aimed at an all-India market, probably Punjab in particular. Her appeal to audiences in Punjab (as well to audiences in thrall of Islamicate culture) was made all the more clear when she played the role of Heer in Imperial's *Hir Ranjha*, subtitled *Hoor-e-Punjab* in 1929.[152] Gohar herself delineated the difference between Sulochana and herself: 'We played exactly opposite kinds of roles. She was a beautiful woman. Very glamorous – I was quite plain'. She

[145] *ICCE*, v. I, p.226.
[146] *ICCE*, v. I, p.235.
[147] *Tej*, 7 Nov., 1928.
[148] *BC*, 10 July, 1926.
[149] *EIC*, p.247.
[150] *EIC*, p.250.
[151] *EIC*, p.251.
[152] *BC*, 23 July, 1929.

also emphasised the superstardom of Sulochana based on high salaries and a glamorous persona.[153]

The Sulochana films were marked by a triple movement: that of projecting the emancipated cosmopolitan woman beginning to emerge in Indian society, a fantasised version of this emancipation and the anxieties raised by their emancipation.[154] Her early films at Kohinoor were social-intrigue films as well as tales about the modern girl who was being abducted by villains and rescued by the hero in narratives that condensed both the social reality of women's increasing public presence of and its attendant perils. However, as will be seen, in the latter phase of her career at Imperial she was given a more assertive personality which allowed her to usurp traditionally masculine behaviour, although these adventure-romance films too had their share of abductions and rescues. Adventure films featuring a female protagonist as action-heroine reflected real social changes but in an exaggerated way, and by stressing the fantastic nature of such deeds emphasised the incompleteness of the emancipation. Indeed, the thrill of exaggerated female physical prowess could be read as a call to women to take up the public world with gusto and attain the projected image in the future. Despite these ambiguities, both Kohinoor and Imperial were committed to a cosmopolitan feminine image through Sulochana's persona. If the image of this feminine prototype was questioned, it was in the physical dangers faced by women in public spaces, not at the level of abstract familial, religious or communitarian values.

The invention of the first glamorous female star of Bombay cinema was a product of its times. The relationship between the sexes underwent a sea-change in the 1920s. The economic, political and social changes rocking society considerably increased interaction between the sexes in public spaces. Co-education in colleges was soon followed by women entering the public services. They became public figures in politics and ran for municipal office. Women entered secretarial jobs, became school-teachers and nurses, even doctors and lawyers. They became consumers of fashion. As seen in Chapter Two, satires about women's consumption habits proliferated in print and on celluloid. With the unprecedented debate on the changing roles of women, changing inter-sexual behaviour came in for close social scrutiny. There was a 'greater tendency to discuss sex questions now than there was a few years ago'.[155] A Soares, the principal of a Catholic school in Byculla, attributed the 'demoralisation' arising from sexual freedom to 'post-war anarchy of thought'.[156] Inter-caste and inter-religious marriage were idealistically discussed and even practised. Young people increasingly saw companionate marriage as the ideal relationship.

Sulochana was the symbol of the future. The new Indian male was represented not by Master Vithal, but by D Bilimoria and Navinchandra who were increasingly cast as romantic stars opposite actresses like Sulochana. Vithal, who had been crucial to the expansion of the market for Bombay films into the rest of the subcontinent, was gradually relegated to the middle ground of film production. The vision of youth symbolised by both the 'Sulochana effect' and the 'Vithal effect', thus symbolised the entry of two new classes into the Bombay industry's calculations – the north Indian and urban young and the working classes, with the 'Sulochana effect' far outpacing

[153] Girish Karnad, 'Glorious Gohar' in *Cinema Vision India*, v.1, no.1, p.23.
[154] For a similar reading of the adventure-heroine, see Singer (2001), pp.221-262.
[155] *ICCE*, v. I, p.115.
[156] *ICCE*, v. I, p.390.

Vithal's. By the early 1930s, Vithal was expressing desire to act in movies with 'love emotions'.[157]

Cinema-wise, Sulochana set the standards against which the top heroines of the period were judged. The discourse on acting around Sulochana had more to do with her versatility than with a specific appeal like that of Gohar. This was demonstrated in the Imperial production of *Wildcat of Bombay* in which Sulochana played eight roles, including a policeman, a street urchin, a pickpocket, a Hyderabadi gentleman, an old banana seller and a European blonde, which reflected not only a fluidity of class roles but also of age, ethnicity, religion and gender.[158] Newcomers had to aspire to the kind of glamour signified by the 'Sulochana effect'. Although the star effect originated in the limited context of the social romance film, it affected the entire industry. A Narayanan, a renter in Madras, felt that stars like Sulochana and the kinds of films they appeared in were the future of the industry:

> Our industry is now advancing on the star system. Just as when they have stars like Norma Talmadge or Eddie Polo, people go in large numbers, so also when Miss Sulochana and stars of that type appear people go in large numbers.[159]

Narayanan saw the connection between the educated class taste (probably that of students in particular) for Hollywood stars and the rise of new stars like Sulochana. The class of people who watched Hollywood melodramas starring Norma Talmadge were being lured by the 'Sulochana effect' into the orbit of Bombay films. Moreover, he perceived the full range of the 'Sulochana effect' in the attraction of the new Bombay cinema *vis-à-vis* Sulochana and 'stars of that type'. If a studio had to succeed, it would have to invest in stars, and in this period, preferably of the Sulochana type.

Sulochana's unique achievement, possible only in a period of cultural transition, was to establish herself as a star through socials, and then turn to adventure films. The dialectical relationship between the cosmopolitan star and the increased stress on romance and narrativisation in all genres made Sulochana's cosmopolitan adventure films closer in spirit to the social romance. Yet these films would not have been possible without the contribution of the social films in terms of new stars, narrative structures and modes of romance. As an observer at the ICC put it, 'In social pictures there is some tendency, on the part of the educated classes, to have some western touches in the films.'[160] The social films possessed a 'stronger sex appeal' that 'invariably ma(d)e an appeal to the educated'.[161] The stunt films after 1928 were indeed characterised by 'western touches' and 'strong sex appeal'. Romance had worked its way from the social into the stunt and adventure film.

The Creation of an Autonomous Cinematic World

The combination of studios, genres, stars and increased publicity created 'Bombay cinema' as a cultural institution, first for the city and western India, and then increasingly through the late 1920s for the whole of the subcontinent. As the number of studios, personnel and stars increased, the industry came to be seen as a composite institution with its own rules. The initial mystery of the cinema company and

[157] *Varieties Weekly*, 5 Nov., 1932, p.4. Henceforth *VW*.
[158] *EIC*, p.250.
[159] *ICCE*, v. III, p.296.
[160] *ICCE*, v. I, p.589.
[161] *ICCE*, v. I. p.115.

production gave way to a cinematic world where audience, studios and stars dialogued with each other through the films shown and seen and the publicity machine they generated. There was a realignment of class hierarchies amongst the audiences as more and more people of all classes flocked to see Bombay films. Increased production, cross-class viewership and genre diversification created a cinematic consciousness, and the star personality was made possible by the publicity blitz which the studios pursued *qua* studios. Magazines carried news of star romances, of defections of stars from one studio to another, the stealing of cinematic secrets and the internecine warfare between various studios. The studio and the star became conventional tropes for imagining the industry, its personnel and its products. For the people consuming the films, they created a unified and self-referential cinematic universe which framed important elements of their imaginations and fantasies.

In another register, proof of autonomy came when cinema attracted some of the Bombay's leading cultural figures. Some of the respected writers of the Parsi and Gujarati literary world joined the industry after 1925. Pherozeshah Marzban, a playwright and editor of *Jam-e-Jamshed,* the leading Parsi newspaper of Bombay, did publicity work for several cinemas – West End, Wellington, Precious and the Royal Opera House – in addition to the contract he had with half a dozen halls owned by Madan.[162] He also wrote scripts for Kohinoor and Imperial. In addition, leading Gujarati writers including IK Yajnik, Shaida, Gopal Delvadakar and others wrote scripts for films. Yajnik, as editor of the newspaper *Hindustan*, made cinema a subject of social debate. The film columns in *Hindustan*, including contributions from young film journalists like Chaturbhuj Doshi, brought cinema into the mainstream social debates of the times. Yajnik also wrote a column in the *Bombay Chronicle*.[163] Doshi went on to become a scenarist for Ranjit in the late silent era and subsequently in the talkie age.[164] Figures like Yajnik and the Marathi playwright Mama Warerkar were also responsible for bringing in 'respectable' actors like Jairaj, Madhuri and Navinchandra.[165] The participation of literary personalities conferred a degree of respectability on Bombay cinema. Their very presence meant that it was taken more seriously as an autonomous medium of artistic expression. This had tangible effects on the configuration of the industry.

The new filmmakers drew on contemporary social issues to attract the attention of the educated classes towards the industry as a viable artistic institution. Issues reported in the press were shown on screen and the press returned the favour by increasingly covering the industry activities, albeit guided by studio interests. As an early example of the circuit set up between on-screen social realism, journalism and increasing press interest in cinema, the debate in the Gujarati journal *Beghadi Mouj*, between the poet Shaida (who edited the magazine), himself a scenarist, and Manilal Joshi, the director of *Mojili Mumbai*, about morality and realism in cinema provides an example of increased elite interest in the medium.[166] By the late 1920s, the *Bombay Chronicle* employed Kanhyalal Vakil, a leading cultural critic, to write its film columns.

An informal network of film-aficionados consisting of film journalists, writers, directors and producers set up a common meeting ground for industry men. The

[162] *ICCE*, v. I, p.470.
[163] *EIC*, p.240.
[164] *EIC*, p.92.
[165] Interview with P Jairaj.
[166] *EIC*, p.248.

Lamington Road area was, in the 1920s and 1930s, a cosmopolitan locale where students and journalists lodged, magazines and newspapers were published and the main cinema halls were located. It might aptly be compared to London's Wardour Street in Soho with its distribution offices and proximity to the West End and the red-light areas. *Pundalik*, a filmed play, had been shot in the Mangaldas compound in 1912.[167] This compound went on to house a number of cinema halls in the subsequent years (including Imperial) and still remains the bastion of film distribution offices in Bombay. Many early film actors lived in this locality.[168]

The Lamington Road network of personnel became a recognisable group in charge of the recruitment of new talent. News travelled by word of mouth and recruitment was made through established social circuits. Introductions were made through various people connected to the industry. The careers of Chandulal Shah, Nandlal Jaswantlal, P Jairaj and other important figures of the 1920s were launched through such informal networks. Chandulal Shah, trained to be a stockbroker, was introduced to the film world by his brother Dayaram Shah, publicity manager of Irani's Majestic Film Company and later a scenarist for Ranjit Film Company.[169] Nandlal Jaswantlal was the son of Jaswantlal Mehta, an administrative officer at Kohinoor.[170] Jaswantlal's office at Kohinoor was a regular hang-out for the journalists of Bombay where the Wadias met many of the earliest acquaintances he made in the industry.[171] Likewise, most second-generation filmmakers began as technicians or office employees in film companies. From the point of view of publicity, such a closely-knit group of film lovers and personnel ensured the institutionalisation of film culture through a well-organised press apparatus.

This group became a central node where information about the industry was collected and dispersed to give the conglomeration of studios an industrial outlook. Together they formulated the Bombay film culture. Ardeshir Irani, at the ICC sessions, said that 'We get criticism both from the papers and as well as from individuals, and we immediately try and improve our films. We try and improve upon those points on which criticisms is made.'[172] His statement reflects the excitement about cinema amongst a group of film followers who created both formal and informal networks of criticism and publicity, thereby uniting the public and private faces of the industry.

Young men took to film journalism and advertisement with gusto. One such aspiring writer, Nirbhayshankar Thacker, was a medical student trying to make a living by writing film scenarios. His script for the 1925 Saraswati production of *Mumbai-ni Mohini* ran into litigation when another writer – Gopalji Delvadakar – claimed that the film was based on his novel and play *Chandrakala*.[173] Delvadakar had already written the script of Kohinoor's 1922 production *Devi Todi*. The advertisement for the film credited him as 'Mr. Delwadakar, well known author of *Nilam Manek*' in the Gujarati Novel Series.[174] Young writers regularly sent scripts to studios in the hope of launching careers in cinema. Mohanlal Dave's success as a

[167] *EIC*, p.243.
[168] Interview with P Jairaj.
[169] *EIC*, p.212.
[170] *EIC*, p.113.
[171] Interview with Homi Wadia.
[172] *ICCE*, v. I, p.159.
[173] *Flashback, The Times of India Sesquicentennial* (Bombay, 1990), p.58. Henceforth *TOIS*.
[174] *BC*, 14 Oct., 1922.

scenarist at Kohinoor and his high wages (rupees 1,200 per script) inspired journalists like Indulal Yajnik to try their hand at cinema.[175] Similarly, the ICC evidence shows that many young people aspired to join the industry as actors.[176] A substantial locally produced literature on films, ranging from technical handbooks to guides to filmmaking and acting was available.[177] Increasingly, the public was being actively drawn into the mechanisms of the industry. Working in the film industry in Bombay became a viable option for a new generation of young entrepreneurs and artists, a far cry from the days when directors had to scour the countryside for players willing to participate in a medium considered disreputable even by prostitutes.[178]

[175] Mehta (1993), pp.47-48.
[176] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.35.
[177] *ICCE*, v. I, p.197.
[178] Interview with P Jairaj.

Chapter Three

The Long Road Towards Respectability: The Bombay Industry, 1921-1928

The politics of class in the industry culminated in a realignment of forces when Kohinoor, the main studio of the early 1920s, disintegrated and was replaced at the top by a number of major studios. In order to provide an internal perspective on the workings of the studios, the chapter uses evidence presented at the ICC proceedings, that for the first time brought industry personnel together with the purpose of collecting material on its dynamics. The breakdown of the earlier order was evident from the hostile views about the workings of the industry presented by Kohinoor employees who had left the company. Garnering critical respectability for Bombay cinema was the lynchpin of their critique of the working order. As will be seen, the discourse of class, honed by a growing confidence in technical and organisational skills amongst the new generation of filmmakers working with a new generation of performers, was central to the self-imagination of industry personnel. According to the new generation, the surest ways to respectability and financial stability was to provide more technically proficient entertainment that complemented the elaboration of the star order.

The second and third sections of the chapter deal with the actual strategies worked out by the studios to formulate modes of address that helped them attain some of the aims and objectives delineated at the ICC. Generic diversification and the creation of a star order were central to establishing the popular presence of Bombay cinema in the 1920s. The present chapter seeks to analyse the strategies employed by the industry to create the star image. The advent of social films and the consequent elaboration of the 'lead role' was central to the creation of the star. The 'lead role' in social films emphasised the individuality of the protagonist of the narrative thus focusing on the performer's ability to create the role through acting skills. An appreciation of skills was then skilfully manipulated by the media machine to create stars out of performers.

However, social cinema was more a pretext to introduce new stars and technicians through a 'respectable' genre than an exercise in bourgeois literary realism. Reform was located in the creation of attractive images of star bodies rather than in narrational content. This went well with the aims of the new generation of filmmakers and producers who sought to popularise cinema through technical expertise and the creation of an aura of respectability around the glamorous image of the star to attract middle-class attention as consumers of and participants in Bombay film culture.[1]

Bombay Cinema and 'Public Opinion'

The industry's quest for respectability meant that it increasingly had to tangle with the thorny question of 'public opinion' – that catch-all phrase to encompass all that went in the name of educated class morality. The assistant editor of the *Indian National Herald* even felt that public opinion was 'strong enough in these days' to act as a censor for films.[2] However, the evidence presented by industry personnel at the ICC

[1] On the conflict between popular market interests and long-term goals of wooing middle-class audiences in the context of Hollywood, see Hansen (1996), p.88.
[2] *ICCE*, v. I, p.543.

shows that 'public opinion' from their point of view had a multi-layered character. Public opinion was not expressed in a mature media discourse about the nature of cinema production as a suitable critical apparatus *vis-à-vis* the industry had not yet developed. At this stage, public opinion was reflected more in the views of industry personnel, who constantly projected the fact that they were aware of the industry's shortcomings. The ICC proceedings and occasional newspaper reviews convey a sense that the industry was still growing and its personnel believed that its mature phase lay in the future. The objectives of the studios were relatively uniform – improving technology and attracting middle-class spectators and personnel. They partook of several elements of general social-reform discourse to attain these aims. But as will be seen, there were crucial differences between the aims of bourgeois discourse and the ways in which abstract concepts such as reform, respectability and realism were worked out through industrial practice.

It will be argued that the discourse of respectability was presented in a way that revealed three important facets of the industry's interpretation of public opinion. The first layer of discourse, that dealt most directly with public morality, concerned the cultural status of performers in the industry. Secondly, there was a discourse on technique and technology of cinema that bespoke a necessity to present the audience with good quality films. The last layer of discursive strategy was formulated around the economic conditions of the industry and the limited possibilities of self-expression. As will be seen, the three layers of discourse were intimately related in theory as well as in practice.

Cultural Status of Performers

Social mobility affected different members of the Indian family with different intensities. While men became cosmopolitan as a result of their jobs and cultural and political activities, women of the same household often remained traditional. Children and young students, on the other hand, were given a freer rein with the modernising impulse *vis-à-vis* dress, social intercourse and cultural activities. Thus different sections of the family stood at different levels of urbanity. The crisis of this differential impact hit the film industry when the impulse to gain respectability led the studios to search for the new feminine look to embody the social realities of the 1920s.

The new social romance film needed a heroine who reflected the cosmopolitanism of the new social outlook. Stunt films had used women mostly as objects of voyeuristic desire in narratives centred on the physical prowess of the male protagonist. Although the cinema habit may have impelled the educated classes towards such films, full as they were of 'scenes of adventure, love scenes and comic dramas',[3] they were loath to acknowledge them as respectable entertainment. The class that consumed the new kind of star and compelled the studios to search for the embodiment of respectable femininity would never have allowed its own women to join the industry. The studios had to cast their net wider to find suitable compromises. The employment of Anglo-Indian and Jewish actresses (like Sulochana) marked a new trend in the Bombay industry, a far cry from Bombay-Gujarati cinema with its traditional heroines. The Goan actress Ermeline became the first Westernised vamp of the Bombay screen. The impulse towards the new look was also seen in the hiring of the Anglo-Indian sisters, Yvonne and Thelma Wallace, for Kohinoor's *Fankdo Fituri*

[3] *ICCE,* v. I, p.561.

(1925).[4] PJ Marzaban, editor of *Jam-e-Jamshed*, the leading Parsi newspaper of Bombay and scenarist for films including *Fankdo Fituri*, observed that 'Good acting would proceed only from a person leading a sober life and surely the features of our actresses with the outline of their profession writ large on their face do not add to the charms of their none too brilliant performances.'[5] He insisted on the employment of the Wallace sisters as a step towards more 'respectable' looks and ostensibly a more 'respectable' class of actress.[6]

Indulal Yajnik felt that only a change in the atmosphere in the studios could lead to an improvement in the standard of films:

> But so far as Bombay is concerned it is not only my opinion but it is shared by many directors, that we won't be able to produce high class pictures showing higher levels of emotion and feeling unless we have more cultured people and ladies and gentlemen of a very much higher class. And I am convinced that they will not enter the studios as they are conducted at the present moment.[7]

This kind of critique reflected the new generation's attitudes towards the incompatibility of the existing class of performers, especially the actresses, with the requirements of literary melodrama with 'higher levels of emotion and feelings'. Yajnik felt that films should embody the reality of social conditions by 'portraying in an artistic manner the very best points of their life and their habits.'[8] For this, the studios needed a complete overhauling:

> They will have to select the whole cast of such artists for some special pictures or for the select studies on the new basis, so as to create a new atmosphere, intellectual, emotional and artistic for creation of new pictures.[9]

There was more at stake than merely a new genre of films in need of a new heroine. In the period following 1925, the industry came under increasing criticism from social workers and cultural critics for immorality. The hiring of dancing girls as actresses was seen as dragging the brothel into the studio. A social worker's written statement to the ICC stated:

> It is a fact that among cinema actresses there are a large number of dancing girls and common prostitutes. Some of these have not abandoned their former profession… I believe that it is owing to the fact that they continue as prostitutes that the industry is looked down on, and that some measure of control and inspection is necessary.

However, when quizzed on the veracity of her statement, she admitted that she had not found the time to inspect matters for herself but had based her recommendations on licensing the studios on the reports of 'certain people who are employed as cinema actresses'.[10] Another social worker expressed anxieties about the cinema halls being used as pick-up spots by prostitutes, claiming that she had not only seen women sitting in a suspiciously isolated manner in the back seats of halls but she knew for a fact that one brothel mistress 'takes her girls regularly to cinema shows'. She also

[4] *EIC*, p.247.
[5] *ICCE,* v. I, p.475.
[6] *ICCE*, v. I, p.492.
[7] *ICCE*, v. I, p.236.
[8] *ICCE*, v. I, p.227.
[9] *ICCE*, v. I, p.215.
[10] *ICCE*, v. I, pp.245-250.

knew five prostitute-actresses, one of whom lived in a brothel and went daily to act.[11] The growing number of female performers in the industry meant that the reputation of bit performers added to the moral opprobrium attached to the studios.

Cinema was an easy target for such attacks as its personnel and patrons had none of the cultural significance of the theatre-going elite who were patrons of the courtesans. There was an increasing tendency to see the studios as dens of vice. The moral critique of the actresses simultaneously stood for a critique of the backwardness of the films produced by the studios. The employment of Anglo-Indian and Jewish actresses was seen as a way of doing away with the problematic practices of earlier cinema.

The sources and purposes of this critique were manifold and the very multiplicity of the voices criticising the industry lent force to the trends for change. In this decade of reform of women's position in Indian society, social reformers campaigned to clean up the immoral practices associated with the culture of courtesans and actresses. Their efforts culminated in the passing of the amendment to the Bombay Police Act of 1923, cracking down on brothels. Through the decade, the law was frequently reviewed to clamp down on the demimonde of performing women. The merchant's world and the world of the princely states, and by association that of the Gujarati middle classes, also came under attack through legislation against gambling and corrupt economic practices. The Bawla murder case of 1925 (on which the film *Kulinkanta* was based), in which the erstwhile ruler of Indore was involved in the murder of the husband of his former mistress – a courtesan named Mumtaz – brought the scandals of the patronage order of the theatre and of courtesans into full public view. The case was widely perceived as an exemplar of the rotten condition of women in the princely states.

The reaction against the atmosphere of sexual exploitation in the traditional world of performance spilled over into the film world when a number of cases of sexual harassment involving the actresses Ermeline and Gulab (both of Krishna), found their way into the courts.[12] There was a widespread belief that actresses were sexually exploited by producers and studio personnel. It was commonplace to quote the women of the theatre as saying that they did not care to act in a medium peopled by common dancing girls and prostitutes.[13] The cinema, bereft of the patronage of merchants and princes, was considered an inferior cultural form. Evidently, class functioned as clearly and as invidiously within the demimonde as in any other walk of life. Ironically, the courtesan Mumtaz – object of desire of the Holkar of Indore and Bombay businessman Bawla – was reported to have left for Hollywood once the dust settled.[14]

The studios countered the charges of corruption by bringing in new stars from amongst working girls and students. Men with college degrees like Prithviraj Kapoor, Jairaj, Jagdish Sethi and many others entered the industry in this period. Newspaper advertisements for the films never failed to mention their actors' degrees. Chimanlal Luhar, the stunt film cameraman, insisted on adding 'B.Sc.' after his name in all forms of communication.[15] At the ICC proceedings, one observer estimated the

[11] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.46.
[12] These incidents took place in 1926 and 1927 and were reported in the *Times of India*. *TOIS*, pp.58-60.
[13] Interview with P Jairaj.
[14] KL Gauba, *H.H. or the Pathology of Princes* (Lahore, 1930), p.179.
[15] Pandya (1995), p.76.

educated personnel in the industry as 30 percent of the total number of employees of the various studios.[16]

Moreover, the studios made attempts to differentiate between the new breed of stars and the older ones. The new stars were better paid and lived more affluently. On shooting stints, the 'respectable characters' were given separate rooms and were 'quite aloof from the others'.[17] Sulochana, while giving evidence at the ICC, said she was 'fairly happy' with her experience at the studios. According to her, the actresses she worked with did not come from the lower classes – they were married and had a 'natural intelligence' for performance in front of the camera. Despite this she felt that 'they would act better' with education.[18]

To back attempts at internal reform, the industry devised new strategies of selling the stars. Ruby Myers was renamed Sulochana, an upper-class, Sankritised and 'respectable' name. By 1928, a fan following could be discerned around the stardom of Sulochana and Gohar. Magazines and newspapers gave stars increased coverage and projected them as public personalities. Elaborate publicity strategies were worked out to prove the respectability of the industry, especially of its actresses. The industry also churned out films that referred to the changed status of its female performers. Kohinoor's publicity campaign for Sulochana was a good example of this ploy. She began her career at Kohinoor in 1925 by making the first of the popular 'lives of the stars' genre, *Cinema-ni Rani*, in which she played a film star, daughter of a prostitute who nevertheless educated the girl and gave her a respectable life.[19] By locating the narrative squarely within the industry, the film exploited Sulochana's persona to project a new image for actresses and studios. Also, by placing the mother-prostitute figure in the senior generation, the film neatly enunciated the winds of change affecting the morality of the industry. According to the film, the prostitution-cinema nexus was a thing of the past. The new actress was a respectable entity. Sulochana essayed a similar role in her super-hit *Gamdeni Gori* (1927) with Imperial, in which she played an innocent village beauty and lover of a cinema actor.[20] By placing her screen-innocence in the context of the film industry, the studio sought to project its clean atmosphere to the public.

Sulochana's first major hit, *Telephone-ni Taruni* (1926), where she was cast in her former career role of a telephone operator, revealed the industry's need to clearly establish her respectability. The autobiographical reference helped establish an analogy between the studio and the telephone exchange. Work conditions in a governmental organisation like the telephone exchange were intended to stand for conditions in the studio – both were home to Sulochana. The studio was projected as safe for the kind of educated girls who worked at the exchange. This strategy rolled into one the two-pronged ploy employed by studios to create stars as described by Richard deCordova. According to him, a star was created through the studios' double strategy of blurring the boundaries between the performer's real personality and his/her on-screen persona, and by circulating information about the performer's real-life activities through publicity drives. Such ploys made the star more 'real' in the mind of the fans by creating intimacy between star and spectator while at the same

[16] *ICCE*, v. I, p.183.
[17] *ICCE*, v. I, p.165.
[18] *ICCE*, v. V, pp.1-6.
[19] *EIC*, p.247.
[20] *EIC*, p.250.

time maintaining his/her exoticness.[21] By casting Sulochana as a telephone operator, Kohinoor at once blurred the distinction between her real and on-screen lives and provided information about the star's real-life persona. In the context of the Bombay industry, this was also an appeal to ordinary middle-class girls like Sulochana to join the industry. If Sulochana was simultaneously an ordinary telephone operator and the new cosmopolitan star of Bombay films, so could be any other girl.

Such publicity ploys established the star as a normal presence in society. She was ordinary and virtuous, and at the same time a glamorous star, a combination that was deemed impossible in the public imagination. Over time, myths accreted around Sulochana's persona that heightened the sense of the ordinary extraordinariness of the star. When a case was filed against Sulochana on the charge of instigating assault on her landlord, the judge dismissed it with the remark that an innocent educated girl had unnecessarily been dragged to the law-courts.[22] Yet 'the innocent educated girl' was also the highest paid star of the industry and famous for being the second person to own a Mercedes Benz after the Governor of Bombay.

The change in the new filmmakers' attitudes towards the industry and audiences was reflected in the biggest shake-up in the studio order in the industry's history. There are hints that men like Luhar were unhappy with Kohinoor's studio practices. His qualification as a science graduate seems to have guided his vision of a new order of things that were impossible at Kohinoor.[23] Moreover, the industry was entering a competitive phase of growth which the status of performers and personnel was defined more along commercial and contractual lines than by their organic loyalties to particular studios. Kohinoor's distributor said:

> Now-a-days it often happens that when a producer has spent a lot of time and money on a promising artist on the staff the producer suddenly learns that the specially trained actor or more often the actress has been weaned away by a rival producer or that specifically trained artist would take up a clear queer attitude in not giving satisfactory work unless his or her salary is increased.[24]

This statement, coming at a time when Sulochana had left Kohinoor for Imperial and Gohar would soon leave for Jagdish, reflects the mood of the times when artists and personnel were searching for a new studio order and a new configuration for the industry.

Technology and Respectability

The second layer of the discourse on industrial change in the 1920s required that the new star image be created through technology suited for the purpose. As the cinema grew more complex and the requirements of professional technical prowess multiplied, even the most conservative studio order needed technical and technological innovation to survive in a market driven by the selling of novelties. The industry could no longer be sustained on the quasi-artisanal principles of the early 1920s. The older studios had taken the industry beyond its own limits. Naval Gandhi warned against technical stagnation and false complacency that the 'Indian consumer' would watch just anything:

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[21] Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: the Emergence of the Star System in America* (Illinois, 1990).
[22] *TOIS*, p.61.
[23] Pandya (1995), p.76.
[24] *ICCE*, v. I, p.564.

> He (the Indian consumer) is always on the look out for new things, he understands something about photography. I am sure that within a few years if we do not improve our technique, our position will be a very difficult one.

Films like *Thief of Baghdad*, according to Gandhi, would run Indian films out of the market.[25] Newcomers like Chimanlal Luhar felt that 'Indian producers do not lay enough emphasis on better photography.'[26] He thought that photography was the only department in which Indians required training abroad.[27] Old-timers like Ardeshir Irani similarly rued the lack of capital for equipment that could be used by available technical experts.[28]

One of the main categories of questions asked at the ICC was about existing technical skills in the industry.[29] The government wished to explore ways of helping the industry by offering training in special schools at home and abroad. It was especially interested in learning how many technicians had been trained abroad and at what levels. The discourse of skills, especially professional technical skills suitable for the growing sophistication of technology, was an important component of the buzz surrounding the ICC proceedings. Every studio was gunning for educated and trained personnel if only for the specialised skills they had acquired through prolonged exposure to the requirements of a modern medium like the cinema.

By the mid-1920s, directors like Manilal Joshi at Kohinoor had started the practice of placing full credits of performers, technicians and directors at the head of the film. Joshi was a distinctive presence in the industry: considered by many as the leading intellectual figure of Bombay cinema, he was considered supremely talented as a director and trained several newcomers to the industry. His films were characterised by advanced cinematographic skills and his technical prowess added to his reputation as an intellectual force. He was known for 'popularising the social' and his directorial signature was 'respectable' and connected with socially aware cinema.[30] Joshi worked within the patronage framework of a quasi-mercantile organisation like Kohinoor, run by a cotton-merchant and member of the Gujarati mercantile elite of Bombay. His moves sought to garner cultural respectability for the cinema and its creators.

The first indications of the increasing importance of technical personnel *vis-à-vis* films can be gleaned from the advertisements that increasingly stressed the creativity of the people who made the films. The advertisement for *Prithvi Vallabh* listed VB Joshi, the cinematographer, as 'Artist' and the director Manilal Joshi along with scenarist DS Shirur.[31] This was understandable considering that the film was a blockbuster and therefore advertised more elaborately. From 1925 onwards, the practice became more common. The advertisement for Krishna's *Immortal Hope* listed 'Mr Chimanlal Luhar, B.Sc.' as writer and photographer and director 'Mr Harshadroy Mehta' and was one of the first to do so in the *Chronicle*.[32] The

[25] *ICCE*, v. I, p.442.
[26] *ICCE*, v. I, p.197.
[27] *ICCE*, v. I, p.199.
[28] *ICCE*, v. I, p.160.
[29] Question 16 of the questionnaire went: Do you consider that there are Indian producers, directors, actors, actresses and scenario-writers of sufficient technical knowledge, enterprise, resource and adaptability on whom the country can depend for a substantial output of films of real competitive exhibition value? What measures would you suggest to supply a deficiency? *ICCE*, v. I, p. vi.
[30] *EIC*, p.115.
[31] *BC*, 12 July, 1924.
[32] *BC*, 27 Mar., 1926.

advertisement for Kohinoor's *Mena Kumari* listed VB Joshi, the cinematographer and Mohan Bhavnani, the writer-director.[33] Pioneer's *Chatra Bakavali* (1926) was advertised as being by directed by 'famous artist Mr. Patankar'.[34] The increasing publicity of technical personnel had as much to do with industry personnels' self-imagining as with the growing popularity of stars, studios and directors. By the time of the ICC, directors and technicians had grown in confidence and wanted more creative control over their products.

The new filmmakers were 'second generation' personnel who had already served time in various departments of the urban cultural world as performers, critics, artists and above all, as film-lovers. They saw themselves as public figures, part of the take-over of Indian culture by a young generation of artists and politicians who increasingly claimed to represent 'public opinion'. They fostered greater public criticism of the industry, for example, through Indulal Yajnik's columns in *Hindustan*. The director Chimanlal Luhar, a chemistry graduate from Bombay University, was also an acclaimed essayist in some of the leading Gujarati journals of the time. Luhar was linked to Sharda studio, which commissioned scripts from Gujarati literateurs like Narayan Vissanji Thakkar. Moreover, he was friendly with 'respectable' filmmakers like Himansu Rai.[35] His partner Harshadrai Mehta started his career as a painter, editor and cameraman at Kohinoor.[36] The director RS Chowdhary was a graduate of the JJ School of Art, and had designed remarkable covers for the Gujarati journal *Mouj Majah*.[37] BP Misra was a photographer and painter of some renown, having trained with the painter Hussain Bux. He also worked in a theatre group – the Vyakul Bharat Natak Mandali in Meerut – in addition to designing press books for films.[38] Mohan Bhavnani was an engineer who had graduated in England and spent a stint at the UFA studio in Berlin.[39] Naval Gandhi had been trained in Europe. He had worked with Irani, and his Orient Picture Corporation was partnered by PS Taleyarkhan, a member of the Bombay Legislative Council and an important Parsi intellectual.[40] Ardeshir Irani, an erstwhile inspector, was to become a Khan Bahadur in due course of time.[41] He had more in common with the Tatas, the rising modern industrial house in Bombay than with the world of the Parsi stage.

The industry now demanded professional skills to streamline production in order to churn out more and varied films aimed at different audiences faster than ever before. These demands meant that organisation of speedy production based on an increasingly complicated technical order for a progressively cosmopolitan urbane audience became the main skill required to stay in the market. Such a situation increasingly favoured modern educated young men, who possessed graduate degrees in the sciences and engineering and were in touch with cosmopolitan audience tastes. However, increased professionalisation also meant a changed relationship between studios and personnel. Professionals could demand a greater say in creative decisions and concomitant wages, publicity and fame. Their reputations as skilled technicians allowed them to bargain for better work conditions, on par with what educated

[33] *BC*, 25 Apr., 1926.
[34] *BC*, 29 May, 1926.
[35] *ICCE*, v. I, p.193.
[36] *EIC*, p.146.
[37] *EIC*, pp.78-79.
[38] *EIC*, p.147.
[39] *EIC*, p.65.
[40] *EIC*, p.96.
[41] *EIC*, p.109.

graduates seeking employment in any office or industry could expect. The presence at the ICC of a large number of technicians and directors who had some experience of film industries abroad reflected the change of guard in the industry. This led to the final strand of the discourse on public opinion – that of the economic organisation of the industry and its effect on the possibilities of self-expression.

Economic Reorganisation, Rights of Personnel and Respectability

The new generation of studio personnel giving evidence at the ICC sessions in 1927 spoke of respectability in terms of workers' rights rather than in terms of elite cultural status. Although the issues of elite respectability and technological proficiency were related, the stress in this period was on the need for internal reform that would bring the industry to a level of technical proficiency capable of attracting bourgeois attention. In this scheme of things, issues of internal industrial reform, especially in the organisation of technical skill, preceded questions of general social and cultural reform. The possibilities of self-expression were paramount for the new guard who related them clearly to the economic realities of the industry.

According to the new directors, the conservatism of the producers was the bane of the industry. Directors BP Misra and Chimanlal Luhar, as representatives of the newly-formed Worker's Association at the ICC, called producers 'infantile', conservative and afraid to experiment.[42] The older studios were content with the returns from their fixed distribution networks. According to Misra, 'Our producers engaged in the industry are getting back the money which they invest with a very good margin of profit on the cheap films, so why should they bother about international pictures and run any big risks.'[43] It was also felt that disreputable actresses kept respectable talent and 'the right sort of capital' away from the industry.[44] This led the industry to depend on dubious sources of capital borrowed 'on very heavy terms'.[45] Investment in technology was minimal. Salaries were low. Misra felt that 'Indians are not getting their dues as much as they ought to.'[46] This, according to them, was due to the general shortage of stable capital and led to blatant commercial exploitation of bad taste and reinforced bad working conditions in the studios.

The period of transition threw up paradoxical viewpoints about the health of the industry, representing a variety of interests. Most observers felt that the industry's future was bright as large sections were still untouched by Bombay cinema. They could project an unlimited demand for films. On the other hand, for insiders like Luhar and Irani, things in 1928 were problematised by the conservative nature of the industry made worse by the restrictions imposed by the paucity of exhibition space. The period between 1925 and 1928 had seen a steady expansion in production. Not only were more films produced, productions had become more elaborate in terms of spending on stock (films were longer and more copies were made), star salaries, sets, technology and the increasing expenses of managing a studio with salaried employees and publicity. The drawback was that exhibition had failed to keep pace with production. By 1928, Irani was complaining that his films lay idle after their first

[42] *ICCE*, v. I, p.193.
[43] *ICCE*, v. I, p.196.
[44] *ICCE*, v. I, p.164.
[45] *ICCE*, v. I, p.166.
[46] *ICCE*, v. I, p.198.

shows in Bombay.[47] Outside Bombay, films made by the Bombay studios had a limited run due to the Madan monopoly.

Newcomers such as Gandhi, Yajnik and Luhar found it difficult to find space in the limited market. Thus, from their point of view, considering the restrictive market conditions, there was indeed a paucity of real demand for their films. New filmmakers were unanimous that it would be impossible to make costlier and better films until the exhibition space for Bombay films expanded. This precluded good social films, which would require better technology and better stars and therefore heavy investment. The only option was to make cheap films and tap the lower end of the market. Yet for bourgeois filmmakers with high-culture ambitions, making costlier films within an expanding exhibition circuit seemed the only way of beating the old producers' stranglehold on the exhibition circuit. A similar point was made by David O Selznick in 1935 when he started his own company. He wrote to his financiers 'There are only two kinds of merchandise that can be made profitably in this business, either the very cheap pictures or the very expensive pictures.'[48] Even the most pragmatic director knew that it would have been difficult to beat the studios at what they did best – turning out well-oiled mainstream entertainment. There was no way that a newcomer could produce technically better stunt films when access to technology and studios was heavily restricted. Most new film companies had to rent space and hire directors, technicians and performers from the major studios in order to turn out their films, which inevitably affected the way the films turned out. The high-culture newcomers' only hope was to lure in a new class of audience through social films released in the new exhibition circuits and gradually alter established taste by producing better quality films. If successful, the acclaim from an audience segment as yet marginal could become the new generation's passport into the industry.

Gandhi, who took the more expensive of Selznick's options, backed up his claim to represent the new generation of progressive filmmakers by quoting the success of his production of Tagore's *Balidaan* amongst the educated classes and the fact that it was the first Bombay film to be hired by Globe Theatres, the new challengers to the Madan circuit.[49] However, the power of the old guard was exhibited in the release and commercial success of Imperial's *Anarkali* starring Sulochana, in competition with Great Eastern Film Corporation's production, *The Loves of a Mughal Prince*, based on the same story. The latter was made by the same group of artists involved in the production of Rai's *Prem Sanyas* and boasted the talents of the leading Lahore playwright Imtiaz Ali Taj.[50] The film failed because Imperial, with the advantages of a stable studio order, capital, distribution network and above all, the glamour of Sulochana, made it to the screen earlier. Ironically, Gandhi's *Balidaan* had cast Sulochana in the leading role.

The belligerence of directors like Misra and Luhar at the ICC was in marked contrast to the conservative views of Narayan Devare, who represented Kohinoor. The owner, Dwarkadas Sampat, although present at the session chose to remain silent. Devare's testimony lauded the 'traditional' and non-westernised cinema produced in Bombay, especially by Kohinoor, and attacked the Westernised touches in some contemporary social films. He felt that Indian audiences preferred 'Indian stories, purely Indian stories and purely Indian treatments'. Expressing disapproval of the

[47] *ICCE*, v. I, p.166.
[48] Stuart Klawans, *Film Follies: The Cinema Out of Order* (London, 1999), p.107.
[49] *ICCE*, v. I, p.444.
[50] *EIC*, p.251.

'western touches' and emulation of Western films by 'other studios' he opined in favour of 'giving purely Indian pictures' and creating 'a taste among Indians to like Indian subjects'. Devare felt that there was nothing wrong with the studios *per se*. While he agreed with the general opinion that the studios were stigmatised by the presence of 'girls of lower status', he blamed this on the reluctance of the educated classes to enter the industry rather than on poor work conditions in the studios. When asked whether the studios could take any steps to improve work conditions, he replied:

> In what way can they do it? When we want actors and actresses we have to rely upon the class of people we now get because a better class of girls would not come forward.[51]

Devare's statement was a frank admission of the disrepute of the studio world. Yet it revealed a reluctance to take active measures to change the situation. He seemed to be content with the order of things. In contrast, Luhar contended,

> I think all the facts in connection with the industry have not been fully placed by the people who are not actually directly connected with the producing line. Never mind, they may be producers and proprietors of particular cinema studios; but it is not expected that they should know the business thoroughly well as the workers do.[52]

For Luhar and Misra, the lack of adequate exhibition space for Bombay films was the principal stumbling block in the way of quality film production. They sought to resolve the problem through the development of international markets by enforcing a quota for Indian films in the Empire. Their aim was to 'organise talented people for an international picture'.[53] Their other aim was to get help from outside the industry – from capitalists and performers – to reorganise it. Citing the example of Himansu Rai's films, made outside the Bombay industry with German technical expertise, or that of *Balidaan*, produced by Gandhi and PS Taleyarkhan, they felt that any worthwhile attempt at reforming the Bombay industry had to come from outside. The people within the industry were either too conservative or too busy making ends meet.[54]

Somewhere between the extreme opinions represented by Devare and the Worker's Association lay the views of producers and directors like Irani and Bhavnani, who concurred with M isra and Luhar that the restricted market for Bombay films was the main problem to be overcome. However, they were sceptical of the radical solution of making films of international standard for the Empire market. Instead, they sought to outwit monopolists like Madan through the quota system. They were not averse to partnership with foreign companies as long as there was a fixed percentage of Indian capital in the venture and the cast and crew were entirely Indian. They were also in agreement that the industry needed 'respectable' private capital and that the studios had to be reformed for that purpose. Like Misra and Luhar, they believed that there was little scope for development from within the industry. However, their solution was a different one – the expansion of the exhibition circuit for Indian films within the subcontinent, especially by wooing a better class of

[51] *ICCE*, v. I, p.586.
[52] *ICCE*, v. I, p.192.
[53] *ICCE*, v. I, p.197.
[54] *ICCE*, v. I, p. 193.

audience. This, according to them, would create public confidence in the medium and would lead to the entry of 'respectable' capital and talent into the industry.[55]

The Development of the Lead Role: Narrative, Star and Respectability

The social and the star comprised the two-pronged attack of studios like Kohinoor to attract middle-class attention and garner respectability for Bombay cinema. As seen in Chapter Two, the social was considered the ideal genre for making the industry respectable *and* prosperous. This section discusses the historical growth of a distinctive mode of address that allowed the social and the star to come together to appeal to the new audiences Bombay cinema was beginning to reach in the latter half of the 1920s.

The development of genres and stars set the scenario for another key phenomenon – the development of the lead role. If genre gave the audience an idea of the content of the films, stars playing the lead role provided the generic action with larger-than-life significance. The lead role emphasised the generic specificity (for example, the lead role of the stunt film had to be that of the action hero) as well as star qualities (the action hero had to play out the lead role in a certain style that became his trademark).

Even in the earliest mythological films, especially in those made at Kohinoor, the frankly episodic character of the *pauranic* narrative and the frontal presentation of miracle sequences soon gave way to more nuanced psychological realism. The later mythological and historical films focused more on the story's human drama than on the stereotypical presentation of well-known tales. One way of making the story more real was to include protracted heroic and romantic scenes that would bring out the performers' acting skills. Mythological films that had earlier portrayed epic stories in an episodic way now drew single episodes out over the entire length of the film. Films like *Bhishma Baan Shayya*, *Pandavas in Exile*, *Doom of the Yadavas* or *Rukmini Haran* depicted discrete episodes of the epics and were concerned with the possibilities for human drama than with the deification of virtuous heroes and heroines. Single episodes permitted a depth of characterisation and narrative more in tune with current literary realism. *Raja Parikshit*, made in 1923, was subtitled *Janmejaya's Serpent Sacrifice*, indicating that the film's main focus was the drama of the sacrifice.[56] Existing footage from Phalke's late-1910s films like *Kaliya Mardan* already show a shift from the episodic character of *Raja Harishchandra* to greater by-play between characters, more self-conscious performances by lead players (in this case his daughter Mandakini Phalke) and the emergence of the lead player's persona chiselled out of stereotypical role-playing in mythological films. The realist acting style of the lead performer made divinity more 'real' and 'plausible'.

Public familiarity with the lead role was accelerated in the mid-1920s when more and more film companies began to list full star casts in their advertisements. Plot and character development were emphasised by projecting the 'acting' of studio stars like Lena Valentine and Khalil rather than their mere role playing. A kind of proto-stardom was developing around what Richard deCordova calls 'picture personalities' – performers who were recognisable over a range of films but whose real personalities were distinct from their fictional screen persona and whose private lives were not incorporated into public fame by the media.[57] Specific performers were becoming

[55] *ICCE*, v. I, pp. 161-166.
[56] *BC*, 23 Sept., 1923.
[57] deCordova (1990).

associated with particular screen presences, be it the beauty of a particular actress or the stereotypical presence of an actor. In fact, the very presence of women was one of the most important ingredients of these films. Kohinoor's production of *Vikram Urvashi* (1921) depended on the charms of the lead actress Lena Valentine – 'the dainty damozel of fair graces – blue-eyed fairy of the screen'.[58] An advertisement for Kohinoor's 1922 Super production *Bhakta Ambarisha* went 'The *pauranic* marvel depicting the devotional path of religion which leads to realisation of real bliss. Lovely scenes, Dainty Dances, Marvellous Photography'. Religion and romance went as well together on the screen as they did in the original stories. The episodic quality of the *pauranic* narratives allowed realist seduction scenes by heavenly nymphs to alternate without incongruity with divine miracles thus allowing for the development of the lead player's persona. Adding to the attraction of the actresses' screen dances were the live dance shows that accompanied most films. Krishna cinema borrowed dancers from stage, screen and dance companies as filler entertainers for the intervals. An actress who danced on the screen frequently appeared in real life to entertain the audience.[59]

The development of the lead role and the drive towards dramatic realism continued in the historical films. Indeed, the respectability of the historical film as a marker of regional cultural pride added to the glory of the performers who essayed heroic roles. Battle scenes, love scenes and scenes of piety were portrayed realistically. Most of these films were shot in the princely states of Wadhwan, Palanpur, Baroda or Wankaner. The animals required were borrowed from the king's stables and the subjects of the kingdom provided the extras.[60] Although this cultural proximity allowed the audience to identify more intimately with the lead performer's heroic deeds, the audience's prior knowledge of the story meant that the performer was interpreting a well-known role rather creating it through his own actions. The historical figure's charisma still outweighed that of the performer.

The stunt films created a new kind of hero. Unlike mythological or historical films in which the audience was thoroughly familiar with the story, the hero now fought his way through mysterious and unknown circumstances. Individualist character formation in modern realist terms was created by the suspense of the unfolding plot. As the delineation of the hero's moral universe now depended on how he reacted to unforeseen situations, he took moral responsibility for his actions entirely upon himself. The audience was now solely guided by the hero's action in a fictive space that defamiliarised known reality through the plot. The hero might have borrowed techniques from his mythological predecessors but the story was created through his active agency in a plot that was sufficiently real for the audiences to identify with in the here-and-now but dramatic enough to call for heroic action. In the stunt films, this active agency was amplified by the hero's physical prowess that further emphasised his role as creator of the film. The stunt hero allowed the audience to identify with the role in a more personal way than ever before, a crucial step in the development of the 'lead role'. The 'lead role' of the stunt star battling through real-life physical and moral danger was the embodiment of masculine heroic individualism, characteristic of an industrial urban complex like Bombay. Further, contrary to the notion that stunt films were mere costume dramas, they emerge as firmly located in the contemporary political and cultural ecumene. An advertisement

[58] *BC*, 26 Feb., 1921.
[59] Gulab, the star of Krishna Film Company, regularly appeared on the stage during intervals.
[60] *ICCE*, v. I, p.165.

for Saraswati's 1926 production *Dulari* claimed the film to be 'The most lavishly produced picture specially prepared to depict the present doings of Native States'.[61] The contemporary feel of the films helped further elaborate the notion of the lead role.

The development of the lead role even in the early silent era had important economic consequences. It was pivotal for the establishment of the cinema habit. Increasingly spectators came not only to see films but their favourite film stars as well. The popularity of Vithal, Gulab, Ermeline, Zubeida or Nandram in the early silent era were vital to the fortunes of the film companies. Audiences watched a film because 'nothing that so and so actor does can be bad', observed one of the respondents to the ICC sessions in Bombay.[62] The star value of the lead player, however, had to be enhanced by making films with suitably glamorous production values. Film advertisements reveal that better production values meant spending more on sets, extras, elaborate battle sequences and bigger stars. High-budget films were flagged as Super productions.

The social melodrama brought greater psychological depth and plot enunciation to all genres of films. It is not coincidental that social-problem films were significantly longer than their predecessors. Most socials averaged a length of 8500 feet. Socials like *Kulinkanta* (9144 feet), *Baap Kamai* (8927 feet), *Mumbai-ni Mohini* (8879 feet) and *Mojili Mumbai* (8220 feet) were longer than stunt or costume dramas like *Saurashtra Vir* (7892 feet), *Ra Nawghan* (7863 feet), *Mulraj Solanki* (7546 feet) and *Navalsha Hirji* (6957 feet).[63] The average number of characters in films increased. Bit roles became important and comic sub-plots of most social films occupied substantial footage.[64] Film companies advertised longer cast lists from around 1926 with the advertisements for Krishna productions featuring Gulab (for example, the advertisement for *Baap Kamai* in *Mumbai Samachar* mentioned Gulab, Putli and Gohar).[65] By 1928, a substantial section of the cast was listed in both newspapers. For example, the advertisement for the 'Highly Admired and Spoken of Picture of Imperial Jewel Production', *Lady of the Lake* (1928), not only mentioned its stars Ermeline and Jilloo, but also listed the supporting cast of Vakil, Yusuf and Elizer.[66] By 1925, Sultana was already being advertised as the 'Indian Mary Pickford' in the *Samachar*, thus aligning the histrionic abilities of a performer with a particular acting style identified with that of a leading Hollywood star.[67]

One of the key developments in the growth of the lead role in social films was the use of longer intertitles. After 1925, entire dialogues were placed on intertitles which contributed substantially to the length of the films. With the coming of the socials, censorship records register a sharp rise in intertitle cuts. Intertitling was a skilled and laborious job and made films considerably more expensive to produce. Homi Wadia worked as an intertitle producer for his brother's films, one of the many skills he picked up while he was an assistant.[68] They were vital for a film's success since they provided the 'voice' of the film. Elaborate intertitled dialogue also implied a change in the acting style to a more interactive performative mode between

[61] *BC*, 28 Aug., 1926.
[62] *ICCE*, v. I, p.472.
[63] Information from *LOA*.
[64] Interview with P Jairaj.
[65] *MS*, 24 Oct., 1925.
[66] *BC*, 21 Jan., 1928.
[67] *MS*, 31 Oct., 1925.
[68] Interview with Homi Wadia.

performers. The actors had to act according to the pace set by the dialogue and convey the intimacy of interactive speech more forcefully than before. The lead role now had a 'voice' and was therefore more 'real'. The intertitles provided depth of characterisation and drew audience attention towards the star's performance through 'spoken' words flashed on the screen.[69] An observer at the ICC observed that Indian productions 'played by popular stars' and 'with good titles' were very popular.[70]

The elaboration of the lead role aligned to a star order began in right earnest with the coming of the socials. However much the stunt hero/heroine took individual responsibility for his/her action, the stress on physical prowess always left an aura of unreality about their roles. Their stark moral order represented a clash of ideological systems rather than conflict between individuals. While the lead role of the stunt film hero had been defined by the heroic figure executing impossible physical deeds, the social elaborated the lead role by emphasising human drama, especially the urban middle-class romance. In keeping with the emerging vogue for realist theatre, social films emphasised the 'acting' capabilities of their stars. It is not accidental that the early critical writing on Bombay cinema coincided with the appearance of the first romantic star. *Gunsundari*, starring Gohar, one of the new actresses of the post-1925 cinema, ran for three weeks 'on account of the good acting of the heroine'.[71] The principal vehicle for the increasing narrativisation of the plot was the delineation of romance on screen. One of the earliest critical articles on Indian cinema praised Sulochana in *Telephone-ni Taruni* for 'appreciable points in the interpretation of passion rendered by actress'.[72] Sulochana's skills as a romantic actress were her strongest calling card right from the start of her career. In the light of the romantic definition of the lead role, it is not surprising that a woman star became the first superstar of the Bombay cinema. As in the development of the Hindi social-romance commercial novel in the 1920s, romance overtook the 'social'.[73]

Not only were social films hit by the dual bug of realism and romance, even stunt films began to display a significant turn towards romance. The most important evidence for this comes from the increased censoring of sexually explicit scenes from adventure-romance films in the period after 1925. The heroic star had been transformed into a romantic star. Advertisements for stunt films after 1925 gave higher billing to actresses and emphasised the love interest, indicating a move towards romantic realism. Sharda's *Vasant Bala* (1926) was advertised as 'Full of Love and Fighting Stunts' and the film centred on a stunt heroine rather than a hero, one of the first films to do so.[74] The same company's *Rewards of Blind Passion* (1927) was advertised as '9 reels full of love – emotional and sensational deeds', connecting the romantic sensibilities of the social to those of the adventure film.[75] Over time, as costume-adventure films became more like social films, their plot lines thickened as well. They were advertised as social films with titles such as *Noor-e-Watan* and *Dukhtar-e-Hind*.

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[69] On the function of intertitles in silent cinema, see Bordwell et al. (1985), pp.183-189.
[70] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.124.
[71] *ICCE*, v. I, p.217.
[72] 'Cine Craft', *BC*, 17 July, 1926.
[73] Francesca Orsini, 'Reading a Social Romance: *Chand Hasinon ke Khutut*' in Vasudha Dalmia and Theo Damsteegt (eds.), *Narrative Strategies*: *Essays on South Asian Literature and Film* (Leiden, 1998), p.198.
[74] *BC*, 3 Mar., 1926.
[75] *BC*, 29 Nov., 1927.

The advertising for social films in this period demonstrates the many ways in which the social import of the genre was flagged as different in both practice and discourse. Advertisements for social films were always more elaborate than those for stunt or historical films. Advertising realism evidently needed more space than the archetypal plots of mythological, historical or stunt films. Plot summaries stressed the events that made up the film rather than stereotypical behaviour. *Kala Nag*, a social-intrigue film released in January 1924, was advertised as

> A photoplay (in 8 stupendous reels) revealing various styles of transactions, frauds traced in the modern civilization, and also rape, ravishment and dreadful assassinations nowadays practised by many atrocious Indian villains for the ardent desire of wealth and passions. Vihari falls into society of swindlers called Aristocratic Club. Nirmala falls into clutches of Kala Nag, but after many adventures saves her honour and husband [76]

Although the film's stereotypical characters – villains, a hapless hero and devoted wife – might be found in any mythological or stunt film, the advertisement stressed the contemporaneity of events and the ordinariness of characters – central tenets of social-realist fiction. The need for suspension of disbelief was being obviated as characters in social films looked and behaved like real-life people. They had ordinary names like Vihari and Nirmala and though their behaviour was melodramatic and even emulated historical and epic prototypes, the projected mundaneness of their settings ensured that they were more plausibly 'real' than stunt or historical characters. This allowed for the particularising of the narrative in time and space as the plot unfolded through the performers' actions specified in realistic detail.[77] This in turn gave characters greater psychological depth.

The tendency towards the development of the lead role was further intensified in social romance films. The titles and contents of early social films stressed their modern and contemporary content to distinguish them from other narrative genres. Sharda's *Follies of the Rich* (1927), claimed to present 'the real atmosphere of the love romance' to establish 'in your brain the result of the deprivation of Honesty'.[78] The stress on the 'real atmosphere' of the plot exemplified studio attempts to emphasise verisimilitude with real life over archetypal action. Kohinoor's *Bhaneli Bhamini* (1927) was touted as 'an excellent warning to the young generation to beware of Venereal Disease and take necessary precaution' worked out through the central character of the *bhaneli bhamini* or the 'educated wife', further stressing the increasing connection between on-screen social realism, everyday social dilemmas, the discourse of social reform and bourgeois individualism.[79] Kohinoor's *Mission Girl* (1927) was advertised as 'a picture of momentous moments depicting the life romance of the patrol leader of the Bombay Girl Guides'.[80] Yet again, a slice of the real life of a modern character was offered for the audience's delectation with an added dose of romance.

The mundaneness of the characters was further individuated and emphasised by naming films after their principal characters. Titles such as *Keshavkant BA*, *Indira BA* or *Gunsundari* brought film characters rhetorically closer to real life. Keshavkant or Indira were shorthand for the anonymous ordinary modern individual and their on-

[76] *BC*, 5 Jan., 1924.
[77] Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel* (London, 1963), quoted in Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London, 1998), p.90.
[78] *BC*, 29 Jan., 1927.
[79] *BC*, 2 Apr., 1927.
[80] *BC*, 24 Dec., 1927.

screen travails stood for the ordinary lives of ordinary people. They were rendered heroic by being placed as the central characters of narratives. Films such as *The Flirting Wife* and *Flaming Youth or Why Husbands go Astray* were titled to convey a sense of their modern contents and the everydayness of the dilemmas they depicted, as well as personify the dilemma in the shape of the lead role. Such titles helped people identify the performer with a particular persona. Thus Gohar's role as the conservative dutiful housewife in *Gunsundari* defined her persona as a star and the title itself became a shorthand for identifying her. Similarly, Sulochana's role as *Telephone-ni Taruni* defined her persona as a cosmopolitan actress, further elaborated in *Indira BA* or *The Nurse*. The development of the lead role in realist social romances allowed bourgeois spectators to identify more intimately with the persona of the romantic artist, the first step towards the formulation of a star order.

Star images were now projected to coincide with 'novelistic notions of character'.[81] The star collapsed the distinction between social norms of the times and the character portrayed.[82] This allowed the audience the illusion that they were identifying with a unique character while actually identifying with a normative character all the time.[83] The studios and the press then took up the performers' imagined public personalities and made them into stars.

Bombay Social Cinema, c.1928

The transformation of industrial attitudes now had to be projected into the public imagination, a task made difficult by the artisanal level of organisation of production, the lack of a critical apparatus and technology, and bourgeois suspicion of the medium. Producers and filmmakers in this period were not directly connected with bourgeois social-reform cultural programmes. They had risen from within the ranks of the cinema exhibitors of the 1910s and their cultural imperatives were characterised by their previous experience of audience demands. In such a situation, reform within the industry had to be sold to audiences through the films, star appeal and the publicity machine. The industry's strongest ally was the general public excitement about modernisation. This ineffable element of film culture remains the key to the rise of the industry in the 1920s. The spread of the cinema habit, riding on the back of social excitement about modernisation, allowed the industry to expand in plural and experimental ways. Public excitement about the star contributed to the success of the new industrial organisational order and allowed the industry to effect reform and sell the excitement of change without much help from the bourgeoisie.

The industry remained self-critical, but its auto-critique was mostly restricted to questions of markets, industrial organisation and technology. A rare critical article entitled 'Cine Craft', probably generated by the industry itself, appeared in the *Bombay Chronicle* in the very period of the ascendancy of the social film and the ICC. The critic opined,

> The cinema industry in this country is or may be still regarded to be, in a state of infancy. The tendency to overlook its defects is therefore, natural, but no longer necessary. Both the science and the art that combined raises its status as a popular entertainment, ought to be utilised towards the highest popular standards attainable.

[81] Dyer (1998), p.7.
[82] Dyer (1998), p.21.
[83] Dyer (1998), p.96-97.

The writer went on to critique the no-longer infant industry by complaining that the immensely popular Sulochana starrer *Telephone-ni Taruni* lacked the 'art necessary to render the perfection on silent screen matter of intense human drama.'[84] The ambiguity in the *Chronicle* critic's tone as to whether the industry was in a state of infancy reflects the tentative self-appraisal of an industry on the verge of a cultural breakthrough. His views were very similar to those presented by various personnel at the ICC proceedings who were deeply critical of their own films. However, his chief concern was not with bourgeois values but for the industry to reach the 'highest popular standards attainable'. The industry needed to organise its existing act rather than invent an altogether new order.

But it was not just that the industry was yet to be captured by the bourgeoisie. Its mode of address was aimed at mass popularity, albeit tinged with a modicum of social responsibility. The social cinema of the 1920s was in large measure about visualising the novelty of urban transformation in its material immediacy. This cinema's need to refer to contemporary events in the manner of tabloid journals grew out of the excitement of the growth of the city in inventive ways. This is apparent from the number of films with 'Mumbai' in their titles and from their direct references to Bombay locations. The early social cinema's success depended in large measure on exploiting the thrill experienced by society in *seeing* for the first time its own social transformation. As Gunning puts it, 'During the earliest years of exhibition, the cinema itself was an attraction';[85] and it might be added, so was the city. This attraction had to be maintained through the direct appeal of stars, industry-produced publicity discourses and a civic cinema that reflected the Bombay's own importance as the prime market for the industry.

If Tom Gunning's formulation about the 'cinema of attractions' for early Hollywood cinema applies ironically to Bombay social-reform cinema of the 1920s, it is because the physicality of the self-referential qualities of early cinema that Gunning describes as attracting the spectator's attention to the performance and performer in all their material plenitude rather than on plot or narrative, could well apply to ways in which new social spaces and bodies were filmed and advertised in the social and media discourse. The 'cinema of attractions' did not get attenuated with the arrival of social realist cinema in Bombay as it did in Hollywood. This was because the city's modernisation and the growth of the industry coincided with a phase of global cinema history in which the full-length social feature had become the production norm. This was all the more so for Bombay cinema which had to be established in competition with imported social films to which educated Indians were flocking. Thus early Bombay filmmakers packed the thrills of the 'cinema of attractions' into their socials.

Despite the move towards individualisation of the lead role(s), the Bombay cinema of the 1920s was still some distance away from the kind of realist cinema characterised by a tension between the star personality and the role essayed by the star. The social cinema of the 1920s was still a civic cinema, depending on tabloid journalism and the sensational social melodrama that arose from such journalism. Films had a healthy dose of social intrigue and the sudden turns of fortune that characterised middle-brow fiction of the period. The characters and narrational form were still stereotypical. The spectator came with a rough idea of the plot and character

[84] 'Cine Craft', *BC*, 17 July, 1926.
[85] Tom Gunning, *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: the Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana and Chicago, 1994), pp.41-42.

of lead players in advance, and the performer interpreted a known fictional stereotype, undercutting the character's interiority. The thrill of the plot reigned supreme. Direct references to contemporary events in many of these films made narrational form and characterisation secondary. This kind of cinema followed the logic of the pulp best-seller that exploited the topicality of social issues and thus depended on evoking the historical immediacy of social context for its success. Once the social context was masked, so was the cultural artefact.

Further, it needs to be stressed that this social cinema's mode of address was based on the *visual* exploitation of the novelty of social scenarios. The visual component of the social drama was stressed time and again in advertisements which urged spectators to come and *see* for themselves the visualisation of social spaces and star personalities. Majestic's 1924 social production of *Repentance* appealed to spectators to take note of the 'Thrilling Chase of the Well Known Motor Cyclist RODEOHAC and Railway Train.'[86] The advertisement for *Telephone-ni Taruni* stressed that 'Most interesting subjects are involved in this interesting plot such as: Night Clubs, Inter-marriages, Turkish Baths, College Life for Girls and many more'.[87] Krishna's *Be Din-no Badshah* 'showed' how 'some society scoundrels move in this world as innocent persons!'.[88] The lead character in *Vilasikanta/The Flirting Wife* was advertised as someone 'whom everybody was dying to see all this time has now arrived in Bombay'. The immediacy of the city's social context advertised for this 'cent percent social picture' emphasised yet again the civic nature of Bombay social cinema in the 1920s.[89] Pleasure was to be derived as much from *seeing* the 'interesting subject' depicted through the 'interesting plot' made real through reference to outside reality, thus collapsing the distance between screen and real life in the spectator's imagination.

An example of the rhetoric of the increasing erasure between on-screen action and off-screen real events projected by the social films was when the *National Herald* (as reported in the *Bombay Chronicle*) created the first 'moral panic' *vis-à-vis* Bombay cinema by accusing Imperial's *Dancing Girl* (Sulochana's debut at Imperial) of fostering criminal habits in society through the depiction of crime. The advertisement for the film ran "Was it Sensational News – A Cinema Scene – Or A JOKE ON 'INDIAN NATIONAL HERALD'". Further, "The local Imperial Film Company produced a masterpiece and 'National Herald' created a sensation about the Golden Gang – the Murder – the Police Raid – thus the Imperial studio created a scene and 'National Herald' reporter was carried away by the realism".[90] This was a period when social anxieties about the pernicious influence of cinema on crime was on the rise. Several respondents at the ICC sessions connected celebrated crime cases like that of Babu Chashmawala to the *modus operandi* of screen criminals.[91] Hooded thieves, chloroforming of victims and the use of motor cars and firearms by criminals in real life were frequently cited as proof of cinema's influence on crime.[92] The most

[86] *BC*, 23 Aug., 1924.
[87] *BC*, 10 July, 1926.
[88] *BC*, 21 Aug., 1926
[89] *BC*, 12 Mar., 1927.
[90] *BC*, 24 Sept., 1927.
[91] *ICCE*, v. I, p.156.
[92] Information from *ICCE*.

extreme such allegation was when a respondent from Lucknow blamed the celebrated Kakori train dacoity case on a 'scene of a train dacoity exhibited in a Picture House.'[93]

The civic cinema that stressed the visualisation of social change rather than narrational continuity, when seen in the light of the ICC evidence discussed above, helps specify the mode of address employed by the social. To begin with, the mode of address that stressed the visual aspect of social cinema inevitably meant that the star persona was promoted above that of the character of the role. Once the star persona had been established through the success of films and publicity, people went to see the star in the lead role move through stereotypical action *visualised* in ever-new verisimilar situations. Since society and cinema were both visual novelties for the public, it was the star who provided the plausible link through stereotypical action. Since the star presence was bracketed by the extraordinary circumstances of urban and cinematic transformation, his/her stereotypical actions were rendered extraordinary as well. (S)he was symbolic of social transformation and was part of the atmospheric evocation of the excitement about newfangled behavioural norms enacted in newfangled spaces.

This is not to say that the stress on the visual register of the cinematic mode of address elaborated by social cinema was at the expense of realist acting techniques. Although Sulochana was praised for her interpretation of romantic scenes, critics were unhappy with the general tenor of on-screen realism. Realist acting styles were elaborated piecemeal, with studios stressing the realism of particular affective scenarios at the expense of others, as is evident from the 1931 romance-adventure *Diler Jigar* in which romantic scenes are presented far more realistically than other dramatic scenes. In this scheme, romance topped the list since it was the strongest selling point of the film. On the whole, however, character development remained secondary to the evocation of a contemporary modern atmosphere through star and setting. The realism of this cinema was transitory, developing from verisimilar visual evocation of the contemporary social scenario anchored to the star persona rather than through the transcendent archetypes of realist fiction. Thus although scenes of 'night riding in motor cars on Hornby Vellard' and hard-drinking Cowboys 'veiled under the name of dacoits'[94] seemed to the casual observer as Bombay trying to copy Hollywood without any concern for realism or narrative continuity, the truth was that such scenes when performed around the star personality were symbolic of the socio-cultural transformations of the 1920s in their *visual* immediacy.

The star of this period lay somewhere between the 'picture personality' and the bourgeois artist star of social realist cinema. In Hollywood, the classic example of such a star was Douglas Fairbanks, perhaps unique as a star fashioned entirely from action cinema who nevertheless managed to transcend stereotyping to become a full-blown bourgeois superstar. Indeed, his superstardom in Hollywood was seized upon even during the ICC sessions as proof that performers in popular films could be respectable as well.[95]

Secondly, the civic cinema collapsed the distance between the discourse of social change and the discourse of technological improvement of cinema. Gunning argues that the 'cinema of attractions' stressed the formal and physical qualities of imagery more than plot by drawing attention to its technologically constructed

[93] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.108.
[94] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.46.
[95] *ICCE*, v. I, p.457.

character. The documentary quality of this cinema sought to capture the excitement of modernity in its material diversity and immediacy.[96] Thus, if imaging social reform meant projecting images of new sartorial styles, corporeal regimes and social behavioural patterns in new social spaces, the Bombay industry sought to visualise these new realities through technically superior visual styles. It is not surprising that the discourse on the star was as much about the technology of star presentation as it was about acting. Better technique implied better-groomed star bodies visualised through a superior technological regime. But in a period when social reform was itself a matter of changing the physical aspect of cities and human beings through technology, better images created through better technology were a way of participating in social reform. In such a scheme, genres did not have any intrinsic moral value. Any genre was permissible as long as it reflected the technical expertise of the industry.

Finally, the difference between Gunning's description of the 'cinema of attractions' of early cinema and the Bombay 'cinema of attractions' was that the materiality of images in the latter did not merely reflect excitement about modernisation and technology. Such images were intended to convey a sense of a well-organised modern film industry. In other words, the aim was to produce images that reflected the industry's work conditions through their *material* qualities. Images went beyond social referents to stand for the moral order of the industry. Studios were building their reputations through better films and stars. Attractive images depicting contemporary social change reflected a cleaner industry. The three most important factors that permitted such a reading of cinematic imagery were the huge success of films, an increasingly sophisticated publicity machine and the star. As films became more and more successful (especially amongst the young), they were rendered more socially acceptable, a fact seized upon by the industry which then publicised its tabloid-style civic cinema as a respectable voice of social conscience. However, it was the female star image created through narrational ploys and media promotion who symbolised, in her very materiality, the reform of both society and cinema. Her very public presence dampened suspicion of the medium emanating from the ambiguous position of women in the industry. She was also the symbol of the studio. Sulochana's cinematic glamour and her Mercedes as a symbol of improved work conditions reinforced each other to create a respectable face for the industry. Coming at a time when emancipation of women (especially of the younger generation) was a foregone conclusion (at least theoretically), attractive images of female stars thus stood for social and industrial reform.[97] But in order to attain such capacities, the industry had to transform its own social organisation. It is no wonder that the ICC discourse on technique and technology was also about sexuality and better work conditions for personnel. Social change within the industry reflected larger forces of social transformation which dealt with the same questions.

The simultaneous cinematic rendering of industrial and social reform was apparent in films depicting the workings of the industry. A film like *Cinema-ni Rani* with its plot of 'Horrible Murder of A Wealthy Citizen' for the sake of a dancing girl, a kidnapped cinema actress and 'The Artist Arrested by an Unfaithful Wife' resembled the stock narrative of a sensational social melodrama.[98] Moreover, the basic

[96] Gunning (1994), pp.41-42.
[97] A similar point about the attractions of the visual immediacy of the filmic images of the modern woman is made in Singer (2001), p.253.
[98] *BC*, 17 Sept., 1927.

story-line of a poor girl making it big through the sacrifices of a prostitute mother could have been that of standard social films about 'fallen women' redeemed by the social success of her child.[99] As the film was also about creating a new image for the new generation of Indian women *and* female stars, the materiality of Sulochana's glamour was a symbol of both social and industrial reform. There are striking parallels between the social transformation of the industry depicted in films like *Cinema-ni Rani* and the opinions of studio personnel presented at the ICC. Both discourses stressed the need to improve work conditions through reformed industrial practices in keeping with social transformations. If the film depicted the birth of the star and new urban order, the ICC evidence reflected the industry's aspirations to change alongside the city and its new socio-economic realities.

The social film was, by social consensus, the 'cleanest' genre, a fact used by the industry when the need for respectability was most acute. It was also the genre that provided the perfect showcase for the star's acting capacities. The social cinema was a pretext to introduce the production practices of a new class of filmmakers willing to handle cinematic technology and techniques and a new class of stars in ways that projected a modern attitude to technology, technique, acting and star imagery. Yet tension between the mode of address that depended on visual immediacy of the imagery and that which depended on narrational techniques of realism remained. Once the envisaged mode of industrial organisation had been established, star and imagery could be used for narrational forms other than modern verisimilar realism, as is evident from the fact that Sulochana's stardom at Imperial was defined by romance-adventure films rather than by socials. The industry benefited from the formulation of new shooting techniques, acting styles and a new industrial order gained through the promotion of social cinema, which were then used to produce films in other genres. Indeed, in the post-1928 period, socials formed only a small part of Bombay film production regimes. The metropolitan transformations of the 1920s had lost their novelty value and so had the social film.

On the whole, throughout the 1920s, film culture was yet to be coloured by bourgeois social-reform discourse that demanded socially meaningful narratives expunged of all frivolity. Thus an actress who had essayed lead roles in social films could now become an erotic star of adventure-romance films. A star could play any role as long as what she did was glamorous and in keeping with her persona. There was no need for her to stick to social roles to keep up with bourgeois notions of artisthood. Nor was it necessary for her to tone down her eroticism in order to mask the memory of her predecessors' profession. The earlier taint of cinema's close proximity to the courtesan's quarters had been effaced by the star order. The cinema actress had at last become a social phenomenon that could now be publicly celebrated.

The Industry, c.1928

Things were changing rapidly as film production and demand went up sharply in the post-1925 period. The differing shades of opinion presented to the ICC represented a crucial phase in the industry's career. It was around the time of the convening of the ICC that the industry underwent a major shake-up when directors including Bhavnani and Chowdhry, and stars like Sulochana and Zubeida quit Kohinoor to join the newly formed Imperial Studio, and Luhar and Harshadrai Mehta quit Krishna to join

[99] On the 'fallen woman' film, see Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (Berkeley, 1997).

Sharda.[100] The breakdown of the old-style studios was the biggest reorganisation of the industry since its early days. The reorganisation followed the lines of disagreement represented at the ICC proceedings. The majority of those who testified to the committee belonged to the new guard taking control of the industry after 1925. They included directors like Luhar and Bhavnani who had split from Kohinoor, newcomers like Indulal Yajnik and Naval Gandhi, and older producers like Irani who were gaining prominence in the post-1925 period. Kohinoor was represented by one session and Krishna did not even figure in the proceedings. Although this might have reflected the class bias of a colonial enterprise in consulting only the 'respectable' elements of the industry, the preponderance of the new generation's opinion also reflected their readiness to manipulate 'public opinion' – in this case the government and bureaucracy – in their favour. The ICC's questionnaire had been sent to all producing concerns and evidence was collected on a voluntary basis. A governmental investigative committee whose proceedings were covered regularly in the leading English dailies of Bombay like the *Times of India* and the *Bombay Chronicle* was the best platform the new generation could hope for.

The challenge to the old order was possible in a period of expansion in every sphere of the industry. New studios were opening, new distribution networks challenged the old ones and a new press was making inroads into the publicity departments of the studios. Luhar and Misra's views made sense only in a period when alternatives were beginning to open up for the first time in the annals of the industry. Luhar could quote the case of Himansu Rai as a viable alternative to the existing order. Similarly, Naval Gandhi could negotiate with newcomers in the exhibition business like Globe Theatres to bypass the rigidity of the Madan circuit or the existing contractual system between the Bombay studios and their cinema halls.[101] He could also work in Irani's Majestic film company.[102] Some old institutions were discarded, new ones arose whilst others were reconfigured. It was a period of creation and accommodation, a tension between structure and play. Conservative and iconoclastic views existed side by side. The ICC evidence mapped the lines of tension running through the industry at a crucial point in its history.

The change in the star order was not restricted to steps taken by the studios to project a new and cleaner image for the industry. The entry of a new class of personnel into the studios also led to a reformulation of the industry's relationship with its workers. The era of the superstar meant that the bargaining powers of performers *vis-à-vis* the studios increased enormously. The earlier studio system had worked on the lines of a theatre company in which performers were beholden to the company through extra-economic ties. Financial arrangements had been informal and more in the nature of allowances for upkeep than proper salaried employment. The patriarch-owner of the theatre concern ran his theatre company like a household. Although theatre companies also produced a star system in competition with each other and defections were not unknown, the organisation of the company's repertoire around the repetition of performances of certain key texts tied the actor more closely to the play than the cinema star whose performance of a particular text was restricted to a one-off rendering before the camera. The intensive training of stage performers tied them emotionally to the patriarchs of the theatre. The Svengali phenomenon was

[100] Information from *EIC*.
[101] *ICCE*, v. I, p.444
[102] He co-directed *Mumbai-ni Sethani* with Irani. *LOA*, p.95.

more common and intense in the theatre than in cinema.[103] In addition, stage personalities found public fame through the patronage of merchants and princes. They were patronised more like court performers who owed direct fealty to their lord than through secular public appeal and personal economic mobility.

The breakdown of Kohinoor and Krishna was the catalyst for major changes in the industrial and cultural practices of the cinema as it shook off its Gujarati-dominated past. A major shake-up of the industry was in the offing. In the absence of a patronage structure like that of the theatre, it was in the industry's interest to allow more economic freedom to stars who mattered in terms of box-office receipts who would otherwise move on to greener pastures. A superstar like Sulochana had considerable say in her career. At the time she gave evidence to the ICC, Sulochana had already entered into a contractual arrangement with Imperial. She was tied to the studio contract for the duration of six films or six months, after which she was free to work with any banner of her choice.[104] Sulochana's public fame was based exclusively on her cinematic work. In order to maintain the lifestyle of a star, she could bargain for salaries and choose the companies to work for. She was the symbol of the studio and could take advantage of the fact that she was a rare commodity. During her meteoric rise, her employers were obliged to repeatedly revise her pay scale to retain her services in an increasingly competitive world. Even Zubeida could demand advances from the companies she worked with, although that made her unpopular in the industry.[105] Yet she could get away with it. She had the luxury of falling back upon the company run by her mother Fatma Begum – the Victoria-Fatma Company.

The female star's autonomy *vis-à-vis* the studios and her increasing public presence contributed to a change in public attitudes towards the atmosphere of the studio. Cinema was increasingly becoming a viable career option for the middle-class young. Sulochana received 'a lot of letters from upcountry asking to join', mostly from students inquiring about conditions in the industry. Significantly, most of the letter-writers were Muslims of a 'good class'.[106] Undoubtedly, it was the public glamour of stars like herself that contributed to this development. Their fame helped clear the fog of moral ambiguity surrounding the industry. The appearance of film stars in law courts exemplified the change in the social evaluation of actresses in contemporary Bombay. Sulochana's fame as a respectable star was responsible for clearing her name and establishing her rights as an autonomous respectable citizen with full access to the courts of law. The fame and economic independence of the star, backed up by proof of their legal rights rendered the industry more 'visible', and therefore more 'respectable', and fuelled further middle-class participation in the industry.

It was in this context that a relative old-timer like Irani, a competent technician with a cosmopolitan attitude to the organisation of labour, with the advantage of the new markets opening up in Punjab, and solidly backed by the glamour of Sulochana, proved a more durable institution than the older paternalistic institutions like Kohinoor. The contrast between their styles of working might fruitfully be compared

[103] For evidence of intense personal loyalties in the theatre world, see Master Fida Hussain, *Mera Natak Kal* (Calcutta, 1986). Also see BB Panchotia, *Jayashankar Sundari and Abhinayakala* (Bombay, 1987), pp.16-19, for the authoritarian character of Dadabhoy Thoothi, owner of the theatrical company with which Sundari started his career in Calcutta.
[104] *ICCE*, v. V, p.5.
[105] *ICCE*, v. I, p.183.
[106] *ICCE*, v. V, p.2.

to the clash between the old-style British Managing Agency houses and the modern multinational companies visible in the commercial world around the same time.[107] Like the Managing Agencies, the older companies functioned through the cultural contacts of influential men who controlled decision-making at all levels. This tied workers down to a patron-client relationship that curbed their creative independence. In contrast, the newer companies posed as employers of salaried workers based on a discourse of rights. The responsibility for the production process was increasingly taken over by the directors themselves, albeit within guidelines set by the strategies of the studio bosses. Undoubtedly, this cosmopolitan and professional attitude went a long way towards attracting middle-class performers towards the industry. The new studio system was constructed and perceived as more open and visible, allowing a freer flow of talents and skills and above all, offering the worker some choice in jobs and wages.

Despite these changes, the industry *circa* 1928 was a mix of the old and the new. In a period of flux, the processes of hierarchisation and overlaps were equally important for the industry. Actors such as Khalil, Jilloo, Elizer, Raja Sandow, Zubeida and Madanrai Vakil continued to work in top-level companies. The stars of the mythological and historical films did not go out of circulation with the arrival of the social. Actors RN Vaidya and BP Misra became directors in the second half of the decade.[108] The Imperial roster of stars in the 1930s included the newcomer Sulochana as well as the old-timer Jilloo. The difference lay in the addition of a new layer of personnel and new configurations of stardom. Sulochana's cosmopolitan persona was intended to lure in middle-class audiences, but not at the expense of older audiences. It may be argued that it was Sulochana's cross-class appeal, backed by the excitement about the cinema as an 'attraction' that made her a superstar. She was part of the city's folklore. Imperial's *Punjab Mail*, one of her biggest romance-adventure films in the 1920s, was 'A Picture with an appeal for the Classes as well as the Masses'.[109] Yet her ability to attract cosmopolitan middle-class attention, especially from the young, was significant as well. Young people created the media buzz about Sulochana and, as seen from her deposition at the ICC, considered her respectable enough to ask for advice about entering the industry. The same could be said of Gohar. If a cinematic mode of address is the way in which films position their viewers in terms of class, gender, age and cultural preferences, then the Bombay social cinema and its stars were appealing to a heterogeneous cosmopolitan audience while tilting towards the preferences of the educated young in thrall of the cinema and the modern city. Many a young filmmaker and performer of the 1940s grew up watching Sulochana and Gohar films.

In the 1920s, the industry was dominated by a mature oligopolistic economic structure whose players had a working understanding about sharing the market. New studios began on the grounds of old ones. Cinema halls were shared by film companies. Stars and personnel too flitted from one company to another while maintaining a dominant relationship with one particular studio. They even changed roles from one generic type to another. If Ermeline was typecast as a vamp, she also acted as a social-film heroine. Sulochana essayed eight different roles in one film. The industry itself acknowledged the heterogeneous nature of its own workings in two

[107] On the business culture of the Managing Agencies in India, see Maria Misra, *Business, Race and Politics in British India, c.1850-1960* (Oxford, 1999).
[108] Information from *LOA*.
[109] *BC*, 9 Mar., 1929

films produced in 1930 that involved many of the players appearing in the ICC sessions.

Cinema Girl, produced by Imperial and starring Prithviraj Kapoor on his debut alongside Ermeline, referred to the biographies of early film personalities, including Dwarkadas Sampat. It also brought out how producers curtailed the freedom of directors, a running theme in the new generation's depositions to the ICC. The same year, Kohinoor United Artists (KUA) produced *Daily Mail* directed by NG Devare. This biopic of the industry was a thinly disguised tale about the daily *Hindustan*, edited by IK Yajnik, another important respondent at the ICC sessions. It also satirised Chandulal Shah, formerly of Kohinoor and now head of Ranjit, and his patron, the cricketer Ranjitsinghji, Jamsaheb of Nawanagar.[110] If *Cinema Girl* was an acknowledgement of the industry's history, it was also Imperial's way of insinuating itself into the genealogy of Bombay cinema as the new leader of the industry. The film signalled the demise of an older order of industrial organisation and the continuation of the best in that order through the sensibilities of a new generation of filmmakers. *Daily Mail* was a cinematic version of Devare's scepticism expressed to the ICC about the new generation of filmmakers who sought to reform the industry. Devare was obviously attacking those who left Kohinoor as well as the new generation of filmmakers like Yajnik. The KUA production was the old order hitting back. These films demonstrated that opposed modes of studio and production organisation could co-exist. None of the studios promoted productions in terms of the moral superiority of films, something that occurs only when sections of the industry start considering themselves repositories of elite culture.

Despite these ambiguities, changes in the financial sector of the industry were visible within a year of the ICC sessions. Sharda, the company made famous by Luhar and Mehta's stunt films, went public in 1929 with an authorised capital of rupees 15 lakh. Amongst its directors was Mayashanker Bhatt, the financial power behind Phalke's Hindustan Film Company and Raja Partapgir Narsingirji. They referred extensively to the ICC report in their prospectus:

> This discussion shows that public bodies have come to realise the potentialities of the Industry, and therefore all engaged in this business must review the ground afresh and devise fresh means for the expansion of the business and for the raising the artistic and technical and financial level of the industry.

It further quoted the ICC about the 'need of public companies with a Board of Directors' that would 'command respect and an adequate capital' in opposition to film companies that were 'purely private individual or partnership concerns whose liability is unlimited'. In a brief history of the company since 1925, the prospectus claimed that Sharda had, 'within a short period created heroes and heroines whose names are well known to the whole cinema going public of India' and that the quality of its productions had attracted the attention of businessmen, renters and exhibitors. It aimed to further the process with a new production model 'which proves to be a sure box-office hit everywhere' through more investment and the production of 'artistic pictures' – the Super productions – for international markets. It promised more investment in technology and expansion in the number of production units to produce films for a diverse audience spectrum simultaneously.[111]

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[110] *EIC*, p.252.
[111] *BC*, 4 May, 1929.

If the prospectus provided an idealised view, the period after 1928 did see a large increase in middle-class performers and technicians. Some of the features in the prospectus – multiple shooting units, greater investment in technology and publicity and the grooming of stars – became commonplace in the new studio order. Imperial's productions were considerably more elaborate than anything attempted until then and a steady flow of middle-class performers, mostly Parsi and Muslim, entered the studio in the years leading up to the talkies. Kohinoor itself was transformed into a collective – the KUA – led by Narayan Devare. Sharda produced *The Saviour* in 1929 dealing with 'The Burning Question of the Day – CAPITAL AND LABOUR', probably a reflection of Luhar's stance at the ICC.[112]

[112] *BC*, 1 June, 1929.

Chapter Four

Towards a Transregional Film Culture: Bombay Cinema, 1928-1935

The second half of the 1920s was when Bombay cinema spread from the confines of a limited market restricted to western India and the Presidency towns to the towns and cities of north and north-west India. The first section of the chapter examines the beginnings of a productive relationship between the Bombay industry and regional film cultures. The main focus of the section is on the impetus to this growth provided by the intensification of production and distribution of films in Bombay, Lahore, Calcutta and Poona. New film companies appeared with new personnel and an increased investment in technology. Bombay cinema could not have established itself as the centre of a transregional film culture without expanding the infrastructure of film production and consumption.

The second section of the chapter examines Bombay's relationship with various regional film cultures in terms of the exchange of films, personnel and capital. The dynamics of this symbiotic relationship necessitates some focus on the internal dynamics of the regional film cultures. Whilst the relationship between regional film cultures and Bombay provided the main impetus for the growth of a transregional film culture, the regional industries were marked by local political and economic exigencies. The limited experimental context of production in Lahore and Calcutta meant that they had to strike partnerships with Bombay in order to enter the distribution networks it now commanded. The economic realities of the market need to be emphasised in order to understand the emergence of Bombay as the leading film industry from amongst others in this period.

The Intensification of Commodity Culture, Spectacle and Print Culture

As described in the prologue, the 1920s and 1930s saw the intensification of a culture of consumption based on a 'branded goods economy'. The relationship between cinema and print, described in Chapter One also underwent an expansion. New film magazines flooded the countryside in the latter half of the 1920s. The arrival of sound accelerated this process. What differentiated this period from the early 1920s was the range of publications in various languages appearing from Delhi, Lahore, Allahabad and towns of southern India. The Gujarati film magazine *Chitrapat* was launched in 1929 from Bombay. Hindi film magazines such as *Cinema Sansar* and *Chitrapat* were launched as were *Bioscope*, *Batayan*, *Chitralekha* and *Chitrapanji* in Bengali.[1] Urdu film magazines were published from Lahore and other north Indian towns. Lahore became a major centre for film journalism producing a steady flow of film journals in English and Urdu.[2] Two Urdu magazines came out in 1933 from Lahore – *Film Diamond* edited by K Jetley and *Bioscope* edited by Mr Khaled, BA.[3] Film journalism in English was on the rise. One of the earliest English magazines – *Capitol* – was edited by Rewashankar Pancholi from Karachi since 1926. Pancholi was a distributor of imported films and the magazine carried news from the Hollywood studios.[4] The Urdu magazines, *Film Review* and *Film Stage*, were published from Calcutta.[5] Another English magazine – *The Cinema* – was owned by BR Oberai, a Lahore

[1] *EIC*, pp.20-21.
[2] Producer-director BR Chopra began his career as editor of the film magazine *Cine Herald* in 1937.
[3] *Filmland*, 18 Feb., 1933. Henceforth *FL*.
[4] *SNP*, 1931.
[5] *The Cinema*, July, 1933, p.35. Henceforth *TC*.

distributor. A poet-writer, Oberai became a scriptwriter for films and even started to direct one never-finished film.[6] A number of English magazines appeared in Bombay in this period. The *Indian Cine Guide*, edited by KC Achrekar and *Moving Picture*, published by the Mouj Majah press, were launched in 1930. The weekly *Cinema Samachar*, edited by NR Joshi, had sections in English, Gujarati and Marathi.[7] In Calcutta, the advent of the talkies ushered in English magazines like *Filmland* and *Varieties Weekly*. Newspaper coverage of cinema also increased. The *Bombay Chronicle* devoted an increasing number of pages to film advertisements liberally sprinkled with film stills. The *Times of India*, the bastion of Anglo-Indian snobbery, began to cover Indian films from 1932,[8] breaking a long-standing ban on advertisements for Bombay films.[9]

The film magazines of this period display a growing interest in film criticism. A host of young educated men, mostly upper class-upper caste Hindu journalists, regularly wrote on films. Dr Neppolan from Poona contributed regular articles to *Filmland*. Fakir Mohamed, owner of the Valentino Club, a body-building club in Mysore, also wrote regularly on matters of film and the physique of the stars. The *Bombay Chronicle* started *Indian Studio Notes*, with information on the latest productions and critiques of contemporary standards of filmmaking. Bombay studios were constantly criticised for producing bad films and ironically, for not encouraging a critical apparatus.[10]

Film magazines functioned as trade guides for the industry that allowed it to keep a finger on the pulse of film audiences all over the subcontinent. They established a closer relationship between the media and the industry and carried film reviews, coverage of forthcoming productions and news from the studios. They occasionally contained interviews with stars. The number of film stills in magazines multiplied, reflecting the general increase in the use of photographs in the press. Stills not only made magazines more attractive but brought in additional revenue.

Magazines carried extensive information about the activities of film distributors, helping to link regional distribution networks with Bombay. Film companies advertised catalogues of their back productions. New machinery including cameras, raw stock and lighting equipment were advertised. *The Cinema* carried advertisements for sound machines from RCA and Philips. Advertising revenues greatly assisted the explosion in film magazines.

The Expansion of Capital and Industrial Infra-structure

The expansion of the net capital input into the industry needs to be contextualised against the backdrop of two important developments of Bombay cinema in the latter half of the 1920s. The first discernible trend of transformation affected the size of the film-producing companies in the city, which led to expansion in film production and exhibition. As seen in Chapter Three, the major film-producing unit of Bombay in the 1920s – the Kohinoor Film Company – underwent a series of splits to spawn several influential companies, the chief of which was Ranjit Film Company formed in 1929

[6] Details from references in *TC*.
[7] *SNP*, 1931.
[8] The first such review was entitled 'Musical Extravaganza at Wellington – Madan's *Indra Sabha*'. *Times of India*, 16 Jan., 1932.
[9] *ICCE*, v. I, p.232.
[10] For example, see SR Lingham, 'Films and Journals', *VW*, 4 Feb., 1933, p.6.

under the patronage of Ranjitsinghji, the Jamsaheb of Nawanagar.[11] The other important company formed in this period was Sagar, which specialised in stunt and social films. It was started in 1930 by Ardeshir Irani, the owner of Imperial Film Company, in partnership with Ambalal Patel and Chimanlal Desai who had accumulated considerable capital as distributors of Select Pictures for the south.[12] The increase in the number of producing companies meant an overall increase in capital input and production of films. In 1926, 94 silent films were produced, which rose to 109 by 1928. In 1930, 194 films were produced, reaching an all-time high of 200 silent films in 1931 – the year of the first talkie, *Alam Ara*.[13]

This period reflected the financial maturity of key individuals in the early film industry which allowed entrepreneurs to either expand production or to start new companies on their own. The financial health of the industry improved considerably and reflected the increased confidence of investors in treating the industry as a viable commercial option. This is further borne out by the second trend in the years leading up to the talkies – the proliferation of new small-scale companies outside the main studio system.

In 1928, six new companies were added to the list of the film-producing concerns in Bombay.[14] Notable amongst them was Jagtap Pictures, which produced stunt films directed by the well-known film villain Mr Udwadia until 1930. One of the earliest films issuing from this company – *Chamakti Chanda* – had a script by Manilal Joshi.[15] A company like Kaiser-i-Hind Pictures disappeared after its first productions.[16] The director at Kaiser-i-Hind happened to be Nagendra Mazumdar, who had been a director at Ardeshir Irani's Royal Art Studio and later with Laxmi Pictures run by Manilal Joshi. 1929 saw the introduction of ten new names to the list of film-producing companies in Bombay, including Young India Pictures floated by Indulal Yajnik, a firebrand lawyer and later a Congress socialist. In 1930, there were fourteen new companies that included Vivekananda Pictures with Mr Udwadia as the director. In fact, Vivekananda Pictures was owned by the same VB Jagtap and may have been merely a new name for Jagtap Pictures.[17] 1931 saw the addition of twenty-six new companies, all producing silent films. Of these, the Agarvala Film Company and Jayant Film Company went on producing stunt films until 1934 – the last year of silent film production.[18]

The impact of these smaller and relatively unsuccessful companies (barring the Wadias none of the smaller companies made it to the sound era) cannot be seen in terms of the quantity and quality of their productions. Their significance lay in the way they broke up the relatively conservative order of the master studios, leading to an expansion in the scope for production and capital investment. They seized on the rising demand for films and the corresponding expansion of the exhibition circuit.

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[11] *EIC*, p.192.
[12] *EIC*, p.202.
[13] *EIC*, p.33.
[14] *LOA*, pp.128-140.
[15] *LOA*, p.130. This production was a personal project for producer VB Jagtap. He was the cameraman and his son Jagtap Jr. was the hero.
[16] *LOA*, p.136. The smaller companies included the Little Film Company for whom no details are available other than the name of the enigmatic Saki who directed all their films.
[17] *LOA*, p.160. The film they made was called *Gaibi Swar* a.k.a. *Masked Rider.*
[18] The Agarvala Film Company was responsible for the two stunt films *Diler Jigar* and *Ghulami-nu Patan* whose prints survive, one of the rare occasions on which silent films of the popular kind have lived on to tell their tale.

Although only a few survived, they raised capital input and set the industry's output at higher levels than before.[19] They also set an example that made cinema more attractive to investors and allowed investment to be regularised along competitive lines, thus setting the trend for investments in the talkie era. In 1929, the new film companies in Bombay were responsible for the production of 20 films, while established studios contributed 53. In 1930, the respective figures were 30 and 63. In 1931, the new companies produced 35 films, while the major studios' contribution was 59.

The small companies also became a significant conduit into the industry for new artists. Indulal Yajnik's Young India Pictures attracted 'graduate' actors like Jairaj and Nayampalli.[20] The number of new players who entered the industry in this period was unparalleled in its annals. Almost every new company had two or three new names in the players' roster. Some of the biggest stars of the 1940s and 1950s made their debut in this period.

Commercial success liberated technology from being confiscated by the distributor or the financier if the company went bankrupt. Previously machines were mortgaged to the financiers.[21] By 1936, the producers' bargaining powers with the financiers had definitely improved. Magazines regularly reported the latest technical improvements and investments carried out by the companies. The rise of New Theatres, which began in 1931 is a case in point. Their investment in sound-recording facilities revolutionised the presentation of songs in Indian cinema and furthered their economic prosperity in no uncertain terms. Film magazines uniformly praised the clarity of their sound. In a period of cut-throat competition, technical proficiency put one company ahead of the others. New Theatres were, from the beginning, able to reinvest their returns in new technology. Companies like Wadia Movietone and Sagar Movietone invested in developing automatic film-processing machines with the help of Mr. Quiribet of Kodak Limited and Dr Daehr of Agfa Limited. The first plant in Bombay to process two-colour film was set up in 1935 with the help of Cinecolour Corporation.[22] The first Photo-Cine-Radio Exhibition was held in 1935 in Bombay where a range of high quality imported cine-machinery from companies all over the world was put on show.[23] The most significant development of the period was the establishment in 1936 of the Film City in Bombay by Mr Fazalbhoy, later an important official in the Films Division. It allowed large-scale film production as studios could now hire stages and high-quality equipment without having to invest in them.[24] Meanwhile, Bombay Talkies had set up elaborate studio facilities, soon to be famous for the realistic recreation of the Indian village in *Achhut Kanya*. Prabhat moved to Poona and created an entire film city, predictably christened Prabhatnagari, consisting of a range of indoor and outdoor shooting facilities.[25] The studios began to construct roofed shooting stages, a major development after the roofless studios of the silent film era.[26] Electric lighting was introduced.[27]

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[19] Calculated from filmography in *LOA*.
[20] Interview with P Jairaj.
[21] Interview with Homi Wadia.
[22] 'Film Processing Plants: Success of Swadeshi' in *Indian Talkie 1931-1956: Silver Jubilee Souvenir* (Bombay, 1956), p.153. Henceforth *ITSJ*.
[23] Special Supplement of the *TOI*, 18 Feb., 1935, in connection with the Photo-Cine Exhibition.
[24] *TOIS*, p.109.
[25] *TOIS*, p.108.
[26] Pandurang Nayak, 'Memories of Roofless Studios: Top Lights First Used in Indira M.A.', *ITSJ*, p.153.

The vogue for employing technicians trained abroad also increased. Mr B Sen trained in the Phototone Studio, Neuilly, France, as film technician and sound recorder in the early 1930s, although details of his subsequent employment are unknown.[28] Technicians went abroad and saw recording and shooting facilities in Europe and America. Three leading cameramen – Jamnadas Subedar, Pandurang Naik and Nandlal Jaswantlal – visited England, Germany, France and Italy in 1934.[29] V Shantaram, leading director at Prabhat, visited the UFA studios in Berlin in 1932 for training. The change-over to the talkies was supervised by American technicians like Wilford Dening who worked at a number of Bombay studios.[30] Sharda employed a Mr Crawther for similar purposes.[31]

Changes in the Nature of Exhibition and Distribution

The number of cinema halls in Bombay increased rapidly between 1928 and 1933. In 1928, there were twenty halls within city limits.[32] The following year, five new cinema halls opened – the new West End Cinema and the Rialto (on the site of the old Precious Cinema) on Lamington Road, the Edward on Kalbadevi Road and the Shri Pratap on Chinchpokly Road. Shri Raghuvir Cinema opened at the Kamgar Theatre site on Delisle Road[33] where workers' groups had held amateur dramatic performances and wrestling matches since 1924.[34]

In 1930, four new cinema halls appeared. The most important transformation was that of the ROH on New Queens Road into Pathé Cinema. The other three were Super Cinema on Grant Road, Hind Mata on Vincent Road in Dadar and Olympia on Falkland Road, near Golpitha.[35] In 1932, Roxy opened at the site of the erstwhile Swadeshi Mill on New Queen's Road.[36] It went on to become the premier first-run cinema for prestige Indian productions. By 1933, Bombay had 36 halls.[37] Coronation, Ripon, Albion, Carlton, Palace and Crown had been added, along with the jewel in the crown – Regal.[38] Located at the junction of the Fort and Colaba, Regal was the first air-conditioned building in Bombay and the second in India. Barring the opening of the Regal, the entire expansion in exhibition took place in the 'native' quarters of the city. These halls were mostly second-run houses that operated outside the key zone of Grant Road-Lamington Road. Significantly, the halls built in this period were cinema halls in their own right. Most of the second-run halls had no connection whatsoever with the theatre. This was an important transformation, liberating cinema from its vexed relationship with the stage and allowing it to become a full-fledged entertainment medium in its own right. Through the 1930s, most theatres in the Grant Road area (otherwise known as the Play House) were gradually converted into

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[27] Chandulal J Shah, 'Talkies Built up Film Industry: A Mixed Tale of Handicaps and Achievements', *ITSJ*, p.33.
[28] *TC*, July 1932, p.12.
[29] *BC*, Mar.13, 1934.
[30] Wilford Dening, 'Talking Pictures in India', *TC*, May 1931, pp.20-21.
[31] *TC,* Apr.1932, p.13.
[32] *ICCE*, v. I, p.45.
[33] MSA, HPD files, 132/1928.
[34] *Annual Report of the Girni Kamgar Union*, Bombay, 1928, p.47.
[35] *ARBP*, 1930, p.28.
[36] *ARBP*, 1932, p.33.
[37] *TC Annual,* 1933, p.155.
[38] It was owned by the Sidhwa family and showed imported films only. One of its chief attractions was its Soda Fountain and Bar, which, according to R Sidhwa, brought in more revenue than the tickets. Interview with R Sidhwa, owner of Regal and Capitol Theatres.

cinemas, signalling cinema's acceptance as *the* premier entertainment form for the city.[39]

This period saw the growth of cinema halls in the *mofussil* towns. The magazines of the early 1930s carried lists of old film holdings of the various distribution agencies. The re-circulation of earlier productions allowed distributors to meet the increasing demand for films in new areas that cinema had only recently reached. The *mofussil* town exhibitors complained endlessly that city distributors invariably tried to palm off their back-log onto them without giving them any choice in the matter.[40] VS Mahindrakar, a leading cloth merchant of Bombay and proprietor of Mahindrakar Film Service Company, and Baburao Patel, future editor of the leading English film magazine *FilmIndia*, collected extant prints of silent films to re-circulate in the travelling-cinema and *mofussil* circuits.[41] Not surprisingly, this period saw a rapid increase in the number of touring cinemas in Bombay Presidency to about 50 in 1930.[42]

By 1931, the exhibition trade was strong enough for a more or less smooth transition to the talkies. None of the halls faced closure due to the change in technology. In fact, with the coming of sound, there is every indication that existing halls went in for well-advertised face-lifts by improving the quality of seating and providing other civic amenities. For example, the ROH was closed in 1931 for conversion to sound. When it reopened it had padded seats and improved seating for all classes. In 1936, it was completely renovated with increased and better seating and air-conditioning.[43]

The trajectories taken by the exhibition trade emphasise the expansive mood of the distribution side of business. Independent distributing agents outside studio distribution agencies opened in large numbers. By 1931, Bombay had ten new distribution houses concerned with both Hollywood and Indian cinema.[44] The studios were able to use these to re-circulate their old releases in the *mofussil* and the second-run halls. In Punjab, Delhi and Bengal, distributing agencies hiring out Bombay silent films mushroomed.[45]

The significant contribution in this respect came from the opening of the exhibition market in north Indian towns in the latter half of the 1920s. Large numbers of cinema halls opened in big towns of the United Provinces and Punjab. Even between 1928 and 1929, two new cinema halls – Niranjan and Royal – both showing Bombay films opened in Allahabad. In addition, Pearl Cinema started showing Indian films.[46] In Banaras, halls like the Excelsior and Royal showed a mix of imported serials, Madan productions and Bombay films.[47] The south Indian market for Bombay films in cities like Madras and Bangalore also opened up substantially. Significantly, most of these halls were not owned by Madan's empire. This allowed film companies

[39] Interview with the manager of the New Roshan Talkies, Falkland Road, Bombay. The New Roshan Talkies is located in the same building as the legendary Elphinstone Theatre where the Marathi thespian Bal Gandharva gave most of his memorable performances.
[40] *ICCE*, v. I, p.125.
[41] *TC*, July1932, p.12.
[42] MSA, HPD files, 128/1930.
[43] *TOI*, 7 Feb., 1936.
[44] *TC Annual,* 1933, p.150-151.
[45] Desai and Company of Lahore were distributing silent films for Saroj Film Company in 1933. *TC*, Apr. 1933, p.11.
[46] *Leader*, 7 Sept., 1929.
[47] Information from Hindi daily *Aaj*, 1928-1931.

to tap fledgling distribution chains, providing them with wider access to exhibition markets. The boom in cinema business in cities like Allahabad and Banaras was reflected in the floatation of the Alliance Picture Corporation (valued at rupees 20 lakhs) by city notables in 1929. It owned the Excelsior in Banaras and boasted agencies dealing with film and cinema machinery in Calcutta, Madras, Banaras, Lahore and Colombo.[48] Censorship records indicate that it had previously been doing film business as the Alliance Trades Agency.[49]

In 1928, there were some 350 cinema halls in India.[50] By 1933, this figure had risen to about 1,200.[51] The huge expansion of the exhibition circuit affected city, town and countryside alike. In 1933, virtually every big town had its own cinema hall. A city like Allahabad had 12 cinema halls in 1933. Bangalore had 21 halls, equally distributed across city and cantonment. In Lahore, the number of cinemas was 16. Compared to these figures for big towns, a city like Delhi had only 13 halls.[52] The most significant growth was recorded in the United Provinces and Punjab where 'cinemania' reached even the smaller towns. The *Varieties Weekly* announced, 'The Punjabis are film mad'.[53] Moradabad had four cinemas. In comparison, a city like Mandalay had only two.[54]

The growth of cinema halls in these regions was almost entirely to the benefit of Bombay cinema. The ICC evidence made it quite clear that, by 1928, Indian films were overwhelmingly popular in the *mofussil* towns.[55] Audiences preferred Bombay films to Western ones. Thus by 1933, film distributors were to be found in all corners of the subcontinent. Lahore alone had sixteen such agencies. Delhi had seventeen. They could be found in the bigger towns of the United Provinces – an M Kafayat Ali & Company in Meerut and a Capitol Pictures Corporation in Kanpur. Amritsar had two distribution agencies.[56]

Money made from distribution was ploughed back into production or exhibition. In Punjab, RL Shorey started the Punjab Film Corporation in 1931 from the fortune he made as one of the leading distributors in the province. His Empire Distributors was the sole distributing agency for RKO and Universal films for Punjab.[57] Seth Jagatnarayan of New Delhi, owner of the famed Jagat cinema hall, was also a distributor in the 1920s before turning exhibitor.[58]

The talkies further expanded and developed the distribution sector. Indeed, they set the distribution business on a firm footing. Film magazines indicate that the early talkie period was dominated by hectic activity in distribution circuits. They carried reports of producers and distributors travelling all over India and of competitive bidding for various films. The success of the Sulochana starrer *Madhuri* (Imperial) ensured that her next two films sold at one lakh rupees apiece.[59] Krishna's

[48] *Aaj*, 22 Aug., 1929.
[49] MSA, HPD files, 272/1927.
[50] *ICCE*, v. I, p.15.
[51] *TC Annual*, 1933, p.161.
[52] *TC Annual*, 1933, p.161.
[53] *VW*, 2 Apr., 1932, p.8.
[54] *TC Annual*, 1933, p.161.
[55] *ICCE*, v. I, pp.290-291.
[56] *TC Annual,* 1933, p.152.
[57] *EIC*, p.168.
[58] Interview with R Sidhwa.
[59] *VW*, 21 Jan., 1933, p.4.

Hatim Tai was sold in Lahore for 195,000 rupees.[60] Major film companies had distribution agencies all over India. Imperial had distributors in Calcutta, Lahore, Baroda, Nagpur, Bangalore and Delhi amongst which were the aforementioned Empire Distributors in Lahore and Jagat Talkies in Delhi.[61] Kapurchand's Super Film Company emerged as one of the biggest distributors for top-flight Indian films. Mayashanker Thacker, Phalke's erstwhile backer and now managing director of Sharda, had branches in Bangalore, Lahore, Calcutta and Mombassa.[62] Indeed, in this period there was a substantial expansion in the overseas market for Bombay films in territories like Fiji,[63] East and South Africa.[64]

By 1933, an all-India map consisting of four exhibition circuits had been codified. Circuit N was the Northern circuit which included Punjab, NWFP, UP, Delhi and Baluchistan. Circuit C consisted of Bengal, Behar and Orissa and Assam. Circuit M was made up of Madras Presidency, Nizam's Dominions, Mysore and Ceylon, while Circuit B incorporated Bombay Presidency, Sind, CI, CP and Rajputana.[65] The integration of *mofussil* and small town into all-India distribution networks was to have a profound impact on the shape of Bombay cinema in the early 1930s.

Expansion of the Bombay Industry into a Transregional Context

The growth of film-watching cultures consuming Bombay films in these regions integrated various parts of the subcontinent into an homogeneous audience-pool as is evident from the transregional journalism in film magazines of the early 1930s.[66] The expansion of film culture based on an experience of Bombay cinema created contexts for channelling the enthusiasm apparent in the pages of the magazines into creative ends. The confidence that arose out of the dual awareness of strong regional film cultures as well as of the transregional appeal of Bombay films allowed experimentation to take place in Bombay and regional centres such as Lahore and Calcutta.

The Punjab film industry was inaugurated in 1929 with *Husna ka Daku* produced by the United Players Corporation and directed by AR Kardar. The photography was by Kohinoor veteran DD Dabke.[67] In 1930, the Punjab Film Company produced *Nasib-ni Balihari* directed by Niranjan Pal from Calcutta, son of nationalist leader Bipin Chandra Pal and Himansu Rai's collaborator on *The Light of Asia*.[68] It starred Seeta Devi, the leading star of *The Light of Asia*. By 1931, the number of films produced in Punjab had gone up to six.[69] This marked the high point of the Punjab film industry. It was to collapse by 1933. Most of the companies failed to produce even their first film. The films that had been produced proved to be resounding flops. But within four years, an interactive interface had been created between Bombay and Punjab.[70] Most of the Punjab films had been produced in the

[60] *TC*, Apr.1933, p.12.
[61] *TC*, Aug,1933, p.48.
[62] *TC*, June-July 1931, p.30.
[63] S Partap, 'Indian Films in Fiji Islands', *TC*, Oct.1933, pp.67-68.
[64] Jethalal Ratilal Rawal, 'Indian Films and Our Countrymen Abroad', *TC*, Oct.1933, p.60.
[65] *TC Annual*, 1933, p.153.
[66] For example, BR Oberai not only wrote for *The Cinema* but regularly contributed to the *Varieties Weekly*.
[67] *LOA*, p.144.
[68] *LOA*, p.167.
[69] *LOA*, pp.176-199.
[70] BR Oberai, 'Why the Punjab Productions Failed', *TC*, July 1933, p.28-29.

Bombay studios. This allowed film people from Punjab to be absorbed into the Bombay studios since they were already part of Bombay's film culture. This interface outlived the Punjab industry and provided Bombay with the majority of its stars, directors, script-writers, music directors and above all, a substantial portion of its capital in the following decades.

By the latter half of the 1930s, Punjab was the biggest film market for imported and domestic productions.[71] In 1932, it was the second most lucrative circuit for Indian films after Bombay, bringing in an average of rupees 20 to 25,000 per film.[72] Bombay had to acknowledge the importance of the Punjab film market by orienting its production strategies towards regional tastes. This started a trend in film production in Bombay that lasted well into the early years of the talkies. Films based on love-stories set in Punjab began to be produced with an eye on the Punjab market. Two versions of *Sohni Mahiwal* were produced in 1928. *Laila Majnu* was honoured with a version in 1927 by none other than Manilal Joshi of Kohinoor. In 1931, Kanjibhai Rathod produced yet another version and in the same year, Madan produced his rival talkie version from Calcutta.[73] Countless films were made with elements of dress, locale and dance to attract the Punjab audience. The film stills appearing in newspapers show a definite increase in the use of costumes peculiar to Punjab. Thus a crosscurrent of influences was set up between region and metropole. On the one hand, Bombay cinema invaded Punjab to spawn a vibrant film culture. This in turn forced the Bombay industry to make films tailored to regional tastes.

The hectic economic and cultural intercourse between Bombay and Punjab paved the way for a regular traffic in talent from Punjab into Bombay. Some of the most notable actors and actresses, scriptwriters, singers and music directors of the 1930s and the 1940s came from Punjab including Jaddan Bai, AR Kardar, the singer Rafiq Ghaznavi, the scriptwriter SH Manto and the music director Ghulam Haider.[74] Jaddan Bai was one of the leading popular semi-classical singers of the day who made her film debut in 1932. Two years later she was in Bombay.[75] Saigal and Prithviraj Kapoor also came from Punjab. According to Himansu Rai, the Punjab artists were the most handsome of all and appealed to them to join the industry in large numbers.[76] With the advent of the talkies, singing and dancing performers from Punjab were natural stars in a period when songs made or broke a film. Their powerful voices and semi-classical musical training in Lahore and other centres of musical learning made them automatic stars.[77]

The Calcutta industry was an old one and had a history of interaction with Bombay through the 1920s. This was mainly due to the presence of Madan who straddled both the Bombay and Calcutta film cultures. Although based in Calcutta, he owned five halls in Bombay that almost exclusively showed imported films.[78] But, by

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[71] *FilmIndia*, Jan.1939, p.29, quoted in Prem Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema: Image, Ideology and Identity* (Manchester, 2000), p.50.
[72] B Patel, 'Sidelights on Talkies', *FL* Puja Special, 1932, p.6.
[73] All details from *LOA*.
[74] On the Punjab film community in the Bombay film industry, see SH Manto, *Stars From Another Sky* (New Delhi, 1998).
[75] TJS George, *The Life and Times of Nargis* (Delhi, 1994), pp.27-31.
[76] *BC*, 25 May, 1932.
[77] Ghulam Haider, who came from this world of semi-classical music went on to compose the legendary score for *Khazanchi* (1941). He trained future great music directors like Naushad. Manto describes this world with great skill in his chapters on Rafique Ghaznavi and Nargis in Manto (1998).
[78] *ICCE*, v. I, p.325-326.

1930, the tide was turning against the Madan empire. The film industry had expanded beyond his reach. New artists in Calcutta, arising from the circle of amateur theatre, sought their own avenues into the film world bypassing Madan altogether.[79] One way of avoiding his influence was to go to Bombay or to import Bombay talent into Calcutta. *Mayabee*, a mystery thriller produced by Indian Film Producing Company, was photographed by the seemingly ubiquitous DD Dabke (who began work with Phalke). Calcutta directors Prafulla Ghosh[80] and Premankur Atorthy[81] worked in Bombay for a brief period in the early 1930s. By 1933, a Calcutta artists like Sabita Devi had become a star in Bombay. This was followed by the setting up of Bombay Talkies by Himansu Rai, which marked the culmination of the interactive phase between Bengal, Punjab and Bombay. Earlier, in the 1920s, he had been part of the Great Eastern Film Corporation that combined capital from Lahore and Delhi with technicians from Calcutta and Germany.[82] Bombay Talkies was founded in 1934 as a fully corporate body whose board of directors included Chimanlal Setalvad, Pheroze Sethna, Chunilal Mehta and Cowasji Jehangir, all leading lights of the Bombay commercial world.[83]

Thus between 1928 and 1933, Bombay cinema grew beyond the regional focus to which it had been restricted. This period marks a phase of relative strengths and weaknesses for Bombay cinema and regional film cultures. Bombay had to consolidate its newly-found gains by allowing regional companies to enter into an active relationship with its production regime. Moreover, the advent of the talkies resulted in an abrupt reduction in film production. By 1936, Bombay contributed only 60 percent of total film production.[84] It made up its losses by allowing regional cinemas access to its distribution circuits and by trading personnel with various film cultures.

Regional Cinemas, 1928-1935

The Punjab Film Industry

In August 1933, the Hind Mata troupe was in Punjab to shoot *Mirza Sahiban*. While the shooting was in progress, a function featuring a dance by Sarla, one of the stars of the film, was organised to entertain the Lahorites.[85] The function ended with the presentation of a gold medal to her by L Rallia Ram of Wellington Talkies and partner in the newly-floated Triloke Cinetone.[86] Previously, on 13 January of the same year, a meeting of the local Cinema Art Society to felicitate Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan on his receiving the KBE had been held at the YMCA hall. Sir Sikandar, a prominent politician of the Unionist Party, was a member of the Cinema Art Society and presided over the meeting. Amongst the other notables present on the occasion were

[79] The efforts of India Kinema Art in the late 1920s, based on the work of director Nitin Bose and novelist-playwright Premankur Atorthy, were the first to substantially challenge the Madan monopoly in Calcutta.
[80] Ghosh worked with Krishna and in 1929 was responsible for the hugely successful *Hatim Tai*, a four-part serial. *EIC*, p.127.
[81] Atorthy worked with Kolhapur Cinetone and Krishna in the mid-1930s. *EIC*, p.47.
[82] It was financed by Sir Moti Sagar, chief justice of the Lahore High Court, and his brother Prem Sagar. *EIC*, p.184. Its films were directed by the German film pioneer Franz Osten, erstwhile owner of the Emelka film company in Munich, Germany. *EIC*, p.167. For Osten's activities in India, see Gerhard Koch, *Franz Osten's Indian Silent Films* (New Delhi, 1983).
[83] *EIC*, p.68.
[84] *EIC*, p.30.
[85] RC Sawhney, 'Film Activities in the Punjab', *TC*, Oct., 1933, pp.92-94.
[86] *TC*, Aug., 1933, p.23.

the Assistant Secretary of the Punjab Legislative Council and a member of the University Enquiry Commission. The meeting featured singing by Jaddan Bai and M Gholam Ali.[87]

Amongst the investors in the cinema business in Punjab were leading professionals and government office-holders. Kanhyalal Agarwal, Municipal Commissioner of Lahore, was previously the owner of Wellington Talkies (now owned by L Rallia Ram).[88] In September 1933, he produced Dr HR Sonie's production of *Woman* a.k.a. *Aurat ka Dil*. Dr Sonie was one of the leading medical practitioners of the city.[89] EP Bharucha, another leading doctor of Lahore, followed Dr Sonie's example by producing *Ghanshyam* at the Saroj Movietone studios in Bombay.[90] The most prominent amongst the investors was Hakim Ram Parshad, whose Playart Phototone Corporation was the only company that possessed a good printing machine and up-to-date laboratory. His investment of five lakh rupees was of no avail when his films bombed at the box-office. By 1933, Playart Phototone was defunct.[91]

The Punjab industry reflected the urban transformation of the period. The devolution of powers to the local elite transformed the cultural sphere.[92] Men like Kanhyalal Agarwal used their official positions to corner sections of the film market and to lend legitimacy to such new forms of cultural activity by appearing as their patron. Their connections with local government allowed them to control property and markets. Over time, Kanhyalal, an exhibitor in the 1920s, rose to become a film financier and the municipal commissioner of Lahore. The changing cultural context of Lahore threw together government officials, businessmen, professionals, journalists and politicians. Sometimes one person could be many of these at the same time. The economic and cultural order had become competitive, leading to the formation of interest groups that competed and collaborated to acquire their place in the sun through patronage of culture.

Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, a thoroughly Anglicised gent, nevertheless represented the interests of the traditional *zamindars* who made up the Unionist party. He was related to the Sufi *pirs* in Punjab and sought their help in his political campaigns. He straddled the world of the Anglicised bureaucracy and Indian upper classes and the religious and cultural world of the villages and smaller towns. The talkies offered him a unique opportunity to patronise the 'traditional' in a 'modern' garb. The themes of the Punjab films and their songs and dances alluded to elements of folk culture. At the same time, patronage of cinema fitted well with his need to project the image of a progressive leader. He could take advantage of the euphoria surrounding the cinema by becoming a patron of an emergent cultural order which sought to strike a balance between the 'old' and the 'new'.

The talkies were dominated by songs and dances, which were a hodge-podge of semi-classical and folk forms. The development of this mode of cinematic presentation went hand-in-hand with the release of artists like Jaddan Bai from the courts, *kothas* and theatrical companies into a wider culture market. Backing all this

[87] *VW*, 28 Jan., 1933, p.20.
[88] *TC*, Oct., 1933, p.92-94.
[89] *TC*, Sept., 1933, p.35.
[90] *TC*, July, 1933, pp.28-29.
[91] BR Oberai, 'Why the Punjab Productions Failed', *TC*, July 1933, 28-29.
[92] On the interaction between local politics, commerce and municipal officialdom in Lahore in this period, see David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam* (London, 1988).

was the commercialisation of urban culture. The commercialisation of the semi-classical performative modes was predicated on the challenge posed to princely patronage and the theatre world by the phonograph and the cinematograph.[93] Jaddan Bai left her *kotha* in Allahabad to escape to Calcutta with a theatre company. Meanwhile, she made contacts with performers like KL Saigal in the Calcutta film and theatre worlds. Following her contacts, she migrated to Lahore in 1931.[94] In some cases, stars came directly from the fast-dissolving patronage of the princely states. Thus a dialectic was set up between the transformed context of public performances of songs and dance and the early talkies. Bharucha's production of *Ghanshyam* featured dancing girls from Meerut. *Aurat ka Dil* featured Sitara and Tara, both advertised as dancers of 'Banaras and Calcutta fame patronised by Indian royalty'.[95] The public *nautch* split into two: a private world of the elite homes where *jalsas* were attended by the leading elite of the town, and the public universe of stage dancing, theatre, cinema and the radio.[96]

The stage and screen performances by artists like Jaddan Bai to promote regional leaders and films provided the crucial social context for Lahore film culture caught between the court and the silver screen. Her presence in public meetings explains the ease with which a man like Sir Sikandar, or any such member of the elite, could relate to the cinema. Figures like Jaddan Bai or the dancer Sitara Devi who encompassed the worlds of princely patronage, prestigious semi-classical culture and cinema, were valuable links in the chain joining cinema to the preoccupations of an urban elite still rooted in the glories of courtly entertainment.

The Bengal Film Industry

The issue of *Varieties Weekly* for 13 January, 1934 contained an article entitled 'Unenterprising Non-Bengali Master Heads'.[97] The writer, B Neppolan (from Poona), was of the opinion that Madan's work could not be considered 'that of Bengal' just because he was based in Bengal. According to him, a Parsi's representation of 'Bengaliness' would be 'against law of life', leading to spectators 'looking at Bengal's mind through false lenses'. While Madan was seen as an insensitive alien, New Theatres was projected as the 'soul of Bengal'. Their *Puran Bhakt* had 'shown the rulers' the worth of the Bengali mind. CR Ghosh, the editor of *Filmland* magazine, on a promotional tour of New Theatres' *Puran Bhakt* proudly announced: 'Bengal till now had been decked with borrowed plumes. Now it is on its own.'[98] A week later, an editorial in the same magazine warned 'the non-Bengali film-producers to stop exploitation'. The death-knell of Madan, according to him, should be 'an alarm signal' for the 'unenterprising non-Bengali master-heads.' The producers ran after 'shadows and saddle(d) the staff with fantastic schemes. Money ruled.' The article ended by saying that non-Bengali capital was welcome but no uneconomic waste would be allowed nor the 'exploitation of Bengali brains'.[99] A year earlier, the editor of another Calcutta film weekly had slammed the Bengal producers for not permitting experts in each department of filmmaking to handle productions. He felt

[93] Interview with Narendra Shrimali.
[94] See George (1994).
[95] *TC*, Sept., 1933, p.23.
[96] *Lahore*, p.108.
[97] *VW*, Jan.13, 1934, p.5.
[98] *VW*, Mar.11, 1933, p.13.
[99] *VW*, 20 Jan., 1934, p.3.

production was controlled by 'brainless capitalists with limited knowledge of gunnies and hessians' – a direct dig at the Marwari jute businessmen who were taking control of the studios in this period.[100] The same year, another editorial of *Varieties Weekly* criticised DL Khemka, the Marwari owner of East India Film Company, for compromising on the quality of films in order to ensure speedier productions.[101] The critics backed their economic arguments for change in investment patterns with regionally chauvinistic cultural arguments. According to them, the stranglehold of alien businessmen was the reason why films true to the Bengali spirit were not being made. The magazine *Varieties Weekly* that carried most of the scurrilous attacks on Madan was the mouthpiece of New Theatres.[102] Culture was thus backed by new capital from local Bengali entrepreneurs who were competing with Marwaris to take over from Madan.

The talkies brought about a sea-change in the attitude of the educated middle classes towards the cinema. The aim of the bourgeoisie entering the industry in this period was to align cinema with already elaborated trends in literary and theatrical realism. An experimental phase of bourgeois participation in cinema in the 1920s now became an integral part of the industry. BN Sircar's New Theatres kicked off production with an adaptation of Sarat Chatterjee's *Dena Paona* (1932) and in the same year got Rabindranath Tagore to direct *Natir Puja*. Adaptation of bourgeois literature for the masses became New Theatres' principal calling-card.[103] The practice of adapting Sarat Chatterjee's fiction to the bourgeois stage continued in the early talkies. It is not surprising that bourgeois stage-performers were more attracted to the talkie than to silent cinema. The talkie allowed them to adapt bourgeois literary conventions to the screen. Sisir Bhaduri had already started emulating the cinema in 1924 by calling himself a 'director' instead of the commonplace 'producer' used for the person in charge of play production.[104]

Artistes like Devika Rani or Ashok Kumar came from elite professional families who were in the process of defining Indian culture by patronising theatre, literature and music. Sadhana Bose, granddaughter of Keshub Chandra Sen, the famous nineteenth century Brahmo reformer, had worked in ballets supervised by Tagore. She danced with Pavlova on the stage version of *Alibaba*. She was trained in Kathak and Manipuri styles of dance and had learnt music from Inayat Khan. She was instrumental, along with her husband Madhu Bose, in bringing about a confluence of the dance-theatre styles of the Parsi theatre, Shantiniketan ballet and the music style of the Calcutta Theatre.[105] Devika Rani was herself trained in music and dance at Shantiniketan. Daughter of an army doctor and grand niece of Tagore, she studied music and dance in London at the Royal Academy of the Dramatic Arts and Royal Academy of Music. She had a degree in architecture and was a successful textile designer. She married Himansu Rai in 1929 and went on to become a leading star of the Bombay Talkies.[106]

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[100] *VW*, Editorial, 28 Jan., 1933.
[101] *VW*, Editorial, 18 Mar., 1933.
[102] BR Chopra, 'The Magic of the People Who Were Behind the Scene', http://movies.123india.com/classic/yester/archives/cla_ins_269.html
[103] *EIC*, p.166.
[104] SK Mukherjee, *The Story of the Calcutta Theatres, 1753-1980* (Calcutta, 1982), pp.511-512.
[105] *EIC*, p.67.
[106] .*EIC*, p.178.

The entry into films of young men like Pramathesh Barua and Madhu Bose was bracketed by their connections with amateur theatre groups.[107] Almost all the directors and actors entering Bengal cinema in this period came from the amateur stage specialising in realist theatre. The Bengali cultural elite aligned itself with the world of Tagore, Sarat Chatterjee and the avant-garde art of Uday Shankar. The stage had become an experimental ground on which to present works by Bankim and Sarat Chandra, until then restricted to the pages of prose. Tagore had set new musical standards by adapting English hymns and ballads like *Auld Lang Syne*, inflected by Bengali folk idioms, to his songs. The ethos was one of experimentation with new forms of artistic expression.

The career of Premankur Atorthy, a leading film personality of the 1930s, epitomised the new movement from literary backgrounds towards the cinema. Atorthy began as a writer of fiction, turned to plays, went on to art journalism and finally entered the industry in the late 1920s as actor and scenarist with Indian Kinema Art. He then joined BN Sircar's International Filmcraft as writer and assistant director to Prafulla Roy and followed Sircar to New Theatres. His cinematic adaptations of the works of Tagore, Sarat Chandra and Bankimchandra set New Theatres' productions apart from the standard theatrical adaptations dominating Calcutta cinema in the 1930s.[108]

Experimental trends in music were introduced by neo-traditional practitioners who fused folk, classical and modern orchestral music, the best example of which was *Rabindrasangeet* in Bengal. Again, such trends were first seen in theatre before moving to the screen. Timir Baran, a professional *sarod* player, joined Madhu Bose's Calcutta Art Players and followed Bose's lead into New Theatres, later scoring for films like *Devdas*, *Pujarin* and *Raj Nartaki*.[109] New Theatres is remembered by respectable sections of Indian society and the industry as the pioneering company that introduced orchestral music to cinema.[110] Its music was the perfect manifestation of the neo-traditional trends it championed: it adapted classical music to Western orchestration, thus fusing traditional and modernising tendencies.

The flood of vitriolic writing about the economics of the Calcutta film industry gives an idea of the imperatives of the players in the film market. The late 1920s saw a flurry of new film companies set up by local entrepreneurs and producers. Unlike the Punjab industry where the industry was dominated by the mercantile-political elite, the Calcutta industry was dominated by local bourgeois notables like BN Sircar, son of NN Sircar, member of the Viceroy's Council. Local politicians played little role in the patronage of cinema. However, as is evident from in the magazines, most of the companies were financed by Marwari businessmen. Ghanshyamdas Chokhani established Indian Kinema Arts, a precursor of Sircar's New Theatres, in 1927.[111] The story of the Calcutta industry became one of the struggle for control of the studios between the businessman and the bourgeois entrepreneur-producer.

The recession created by the Great Depression may have led to a decline in the wealth of the Bengali and Parsi business classes, resulting in the strengthening of Marwari business in the city. The first indication of the recession hitting Madan

[107] *EIC*, p.69.
[108] *EIC*, p.47.
[109] *EIC*, p.55.
[110] Naushad Ali, 'Music of the Movies', *ITSJ*, p.100.
[111] *EIC*, p.109.

Theatres Limited was when SN Pochkanwala, director of the Central Bank, stepped in to help Madan tide over the troubled period.[112] But the trouble continued as Madan decided to tie up with DL Khemka, a relative of the Chamaria family, his Marwari financiers. Khemka himself floated the East India Film Company with a capital of rupees ten lakh.[113] By 1934, Madan's empire was collapsing. This has been attributed to the demise of the elder Madan and his sons' speculative habits. Also, the departure of Jyotish Sarkar, the manager of Madan's Globe Cinema, to join the Sidhwas of the Bombay Regal after differences with his sons, was a death-blow to the company's fortunes.[114] The company had failed to pay dividends for several years. The evidence of PK Madan, formerly manager with Madan, at the ICC revealed that there might have been financial misdemeanours by Madan in handling shareholders' returns.[115] By the early 1930s, the reform of Indian companies was underway, culminating in the amendment of the Indian Company Act in 1936, which aimed to increase the visibility of financial transactions and make directors more answerable to shareholders. In such an atmosphere, Madan, a company that had failed to pay dividends for years, was bound to come under attack. New Theatres on the other hand sold itself as a clean and fair-minded commercial entity backed by 'respectable' capital.

The last years of the Madans in Calcutta culminated in a vitriolic campaign against their tottering empire. Resentment against Madan's monopoly was a uniform response of those who gave evidence to the ICC. There was also great uncertainty over the transformation of film-production technology due to the introduction of sound. The collapse of Madan's monopoly created a void allowing new monopolistic tendencies to arise in its place. 'Now in Calcutta, Hindi film cannot be released without playing into hands of monopolists' reported one film-magazine.[116] As the previous discussion makes clear, the monopolists were undoubtedly non-Bengali, presumably Marwari businessmen.

Attempts by various parties to establish monopolies gave rise to extreme competition and raised the stakes in the industry. Here, the Bengali financiers were at a distinct disadvantage compared to their Marwari counterparts who commanded greater standing capital. The critique against them hinged on the unethical behaviour of the capitalists and their studio-managers who were pouring in money to lure singing-stars to guarantee the success of their films. By the mid-1930s, BN Sircar's New Theatres was the symbol of progressive cinema as compared to the cinema of Madan; it was hailed by all critics for ushering in a disciplined and ethical studio system. An aesthetic argument legitimised the position of New Theatres in Bengal film culture *post facto*. In the early 1930s, however, the scene was one of straightforward economic battles fought by the various players on their own terms with culture being a pawn in the game.

The Marathi Film Culture

The relation between Marathi film culture and Bombay had been an organic one. DG Phalke made his early films in Bombay and then shifted to Nasik when he founded the Hindustan Film Company. Kolhapur was another centre for film production, home to the Maharashtra Film Company. Patronised by Chhatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur, the

[112] *FL*, 9 July, 1932, p.13.
[113] *TC*, Aug., 1932, p.12.
[114] Interview with R Sidhwa.
[115] *ICCE*, v. III, p.766.
[116] *FL*, Editorial, 27 May, 1933.

company produced some of the best-regarded historical and social films of the 1920s, including hits and critical successes like *Kalyan Khajina* (1924), *Savkari Pash* (1925) and *Netaji Palkar* (1927). Baburao Painter, proprietor of the studio, was an artist and his films were renowned for their sets. Painter also trained director-technicians like VG Damle, S Fattelal and V Shantaram and the company provided the nucleus for Prabhat, the most celebrated Marathi studio, founded in Kolhapur in 1929.[117]

In 1933, Prabhat moved to Poona. Poona had already been home to film companies like United Pictures Syndicate and Aryan Film Company, both run by ND Sarpotdar.[118] These companies used the talents of writers and performers like Bhalji and Baburao Pendharkar. After Prabhat's move to Poona, the city became the home of Marathi film culture where it produced some of the classics of the early talkies like *Maya Machhindra* (1932), *Sinhagad* (1933), *Amritmanthan* (1934) and *Amar Jyoti* (1936), all bilingual productions in Marathi and Hindustani. V Shantaram was fast becoming a leading intellectual force of Indian cinema. In 1934, Prabhat combined with Saraswati Cinetone, Bombay and Abdealli and Company to start the West India Theatres Limited to market their own films. This company gained control of Krishna and Minerva theatres in Bombay and a number of theatres in Poona, Hyderabad, Secunderabad and Madras, ensuring the regular release of its films.[119]

Regional Cinemas and Bombay, c.1935

The Punjab film industry failed due to the lack of the experience, capital and infrastructure of the Lahore players. Artists were hired arbitrarily depending on whether a patron could cobble together a group of performers from various north Indian centres. The advertisement for *Aurat ka Dil* in *The Cinema* issue of September 1933 revealed the random ways in which artists were hired according to availability and proximity. A production could bring together artists from all parts of the subcontinent and from all social backgrounds:

Dr. HR Sonie's

Woman or Aurat ka Dil

Jairaj and Mubarak (famous artistes of the Bombay screen and the English Stage)

with Sitara and Tara (of Banaras and Calcutta fame patronised by Indian royalty)

Ramla and Shamas-din (Pride of the Punjab)

And a chorus consisting of Gulshan, Feroze, Veeta, Mary, Jaini, Nidia, Gita and others[120]

In the long run, the big artists migrated to Bombay in search of more stable employment. The attempts at starting a film industry in Lahore were probably inspired by the idea that the Punjab market was strong enough to support an industry, and make inroads into the all-India market. Given the popularity of Punjab themes in Bombay films and the huge popularity of films in Punjab, this was a plausible line of thought. But the workings of the market and the difficult task of organising an industry from scratch proved too much for efforts to foster an indigenous industry.

[117] *EIC*, p.141.
[118] *EIC*, p.207.
[119] *BC*, 17 Nov., 1934.
[120] *TC*, Sept. 1933, p.9.

By 1934, Bombay with its superior organisational, marketing and film-production experience had absorbed most of the Punjab film people. Now Bombay dictated how Punjabi themes were presented to Punjab and the world in general. By 1935, other film types had taken over, most notably the stunt films featuring Fearless Nadia. That the importance of Punjab film culture remained relevant for this new genre was reflected in a curious touch added by director Homi Wadia when he named Nadia's wonder horse *Punjab ka Beta*. The Punjab folk tradition of valour and romance lived on, but this time Bombay called the shots. Although Lahore film culture revived briefly in the early 1940s, it died out due to Partition. Many artists working in Bombay chose to go back to Lahore while others stayed back. However, the traffic of film cultures between the cities was halted.

The Bengal players in the post-Madan era had to adapt to the restrictions of the regional market. None of the companies attracted the kind of capital that Madan could command. The Bengal industry, too, had to share its markets with Bombay in order to survive. This was done by producing bilingual versions of the early talkies in Bengali and Hindustani. The popularity of their Hindustani films allowed these companies to stay afloat and consolidate their regional market on the basis of the returns from the all-India circuit. However, while the Bengali versions were restricted to the Bengal market, the Hindustani versions, potentially the more lucrative ones, were at the mercy of the distributors aligned with Bombay. In the end, Bombay absorbed much of the Bengal industry just as it had done in the Punjab case. By 1939, New Theatres had collapsed. Not having established its own outlets, it fell prey to the professional distributors who charged crippling commissions.[121] Its main players, Prithviraj Kapoor and Saigal, had moved on to Bombay to join Ranjit Studios.

The period was thus marked by the frenetic movement of artists and businessmen in search of employment and markets. Magazines frequently reported tours of the country by artistes of Bengal or Bombay. Public meetings were held in honour of the New Theatres artists in Punjab.[122] Simultaneously, actors arrived in Bombay from Calcutta, Lahore and Hyderabad. Punjab directors made films in Bombay studios. Businessmen from Delhi toured north India to systematise the distribution circuit.[123] BN Sircar toured all over India with New Theatres films.[124] A deputation of the Bombay industry met government officials in Delhi in 1933 to discuss ways to improve the industry. They were entertained by Delhi businessmen in the exhibition and distribution trade. The effort was to integrate the industry into a transregional network to ensure easy expansion in the future.[125] Starting from the period of the late silent cinema, these trends intensified once the talkies came in. Yet Bombay controlled the fate of other contenders through its greater financial power and years of experience in production and marketing.

[121] *EIC*, p.154.
[122] 'Lahorites to meet the Bengali Stars', *VW* , 11 Mar., 1933, p.13.
[123] *TC*, May, 1932, p.35.
[124] *VW*, 2 Mar., 1934, p.3.
[125] *FL*, 4 Mar., 1933.

Chapter Five

Bombay Film Cultures: The Late Silent Cinema Era and the Transition to the Talkies

The transregional context of Bombay cinema in the late 1920s determined the cultural parameters of film production. As seen in the last chapter, the Bombay studios increasingly oriented production towards their lucrative north Indian markets. Bombay cinema's tilt towards the *bazaar* culture of urban north India gave it a cosmopolitan flavour. The first section discusses the growth of this cosmopolitan cinema around the activities of a new generation of filmmakers and performers. A focus on the audience and the general cultural temper of the times adds to an understanding of how Bombay cinema drew from literary and other performative traditions of the *bazaar* to establish itself as the most popular entertainment medium in the subcontinent.

The coming of the talkies considerably altered the cultural scenario of the industry. Rising bourgeois interest in cinema affected the studios' production strategies. The second section delineates some of the cultural imperatives of the bourgeoisie, centred around a discourse on literary realism in cinema. In order to understand the bourgeois cultural agenda, the discourse of realism in cinema needs to be placed in the context of similar discourses affecting art, literature and theatre from the turn of the century, discourses that were intimately related to the cultural-nationalist and social-reformist agendas of this class.

The Emergence of a New Bombay Cinema Generation

The growing contacts between Bombay and regional film cultures and the overall flexibility in the recruitment order ensured the entry of young people from all parts of the subcontinent and added to the cosmopolitan variety of the industry and its films. In this period, the industry displayed its cosmopolitan attitudes in a variety of ways. Not only did studios employ people from all parts of the subcontinent, they also linked up both with middle-class and *bazaar* cultures. As mentioned earlier, the roster of players in a company like Imperial included middle-class actors as well as old-timers from a more traditional background. The growing interest of the educated classes in Bombay cinema was reflected even in company names such as 'Vivekananda Pictures', showing a need to connect with the dominant trends of elite culture. It needs to be emphasised that while it was the Parsi, Gujarati and north Indian middle class that was in charge of film production, the studios were willing to experiment with a wide variety of performers as was evident from the unprecedented number of performers recruited in this period. Stars such as Madhuri, Rampyari, Hydershah, Panna, Zebu and Lobo rubbed shoulders with middle-class stars like Prithviraj Kapoor and a doyen of the stage like Elizer.[1] The elaboration of the star phenomenon added to the cosmopolitanism of the industry.

The Kohinoor-trained generation and a number of newcomers together laid the foundations of a new cosmopolitan film culture, centred around the activities of Imperial and new studios like Sagar, Ranjit and Saroj. The seeds for this development had been laid before 1928, but the changes in the studio order visible around the time of the ICC were necessary for such tendencies to flourish. This was the period when

[1] Information from *LOA*.

silent film production was at its height and the economic prosperity engendered by the spread of markets to north India and parts of south India provided ample scope to raise standards of production. Himansu Rai, one of the new entrants into the film world and a pioneer in producing films with international collaboration commented on the standards of the Bombay films around 1928:

> I saw some pictures in Bombay produced by the "Imperial". I found that the technique which they have developed in the 2 ½ years was wonderful.[2]

A number of respondents at the ICC rated Imperial's films higher than most Bombay productions.[3] Film stills after 1928 display a marked move towards realist framing techniques in camerawork and the management of screen space. The quality of imagery was more accomplished than in previous productions. Films produced in this period reflected the increased capital input into the industry: they were longer, employed better-paid stars and were more sumptuous.

The new studios took off at higher levels of technological sophistication than the older companies. The Hollywood-trained Ezra Mir (born Edwin Myers in Calcutta) turned out spectacular adventure films at Sagar.[4] The Kohinoor-trained generation of BP Misra, RS Chowdhry and Mohan Bhavnani matured in the post-1928 period and produced high-calibre work at Imperial. Newcomers like Nagendra Mazumdar, Sarvottam Badami, Nandlal Jaswantlal, Mehboob Khan and Dhirubhai Desai went on to become respected directors in the talkie era. The lawyer-turned-filmmaker and member of the Communist party, JBH Wadia – director at Young United Players – started producing high-quality stunt films in this period, a tradition carried on by his brother Homi in the talkie era.[5] Fuelled by the star personalities of Sulochana, Prithviraj Kapoor, the brothers Bilimoria and a host of newcomers including Navinchandra, Boman Shah, Jairaj, M azhar Khan, Nayampalli and Jagdish Sethi, the new companies were able to align standards of acting, direction and technical skill with educated class expectations.[6] Prithviraj Kapoor had long-standing experience in the theatre, earning acclaim as Laertes in the Grant Anderson Company's *Hamlet*.[7]

New companies challenged the conservative order of the older studios in more ways than one. If the older studios stood for the culture of the Gujarati-Parsi mercantile class, the newer ones represented a more cosmopolitan ethos in their willingness to experiment with film production and choice of artists. The experimental impulse arose out of a need for newer ideas to survive the cut-throat competition introduced by the sudden influx of new capital. In these times, 'ideas' included everything from new themes to new technology, stars, directors and other personnel. A company like Kaiser-i-Hind Film Company (again the name reflects the more cosmopolitan non-Gujarati flavour of the industry) could draw away a director of Nagendra Mazumdar's status from a dominant company like Laxmi Pictures. A personality like Himansu Rai could take talent from all over the subcontinent to produce films influenced by German expressionist cinema.[8]

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[2] *ICCE*, v. III, p.1008.
[3] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.126
[4] *EIC*, p.147.
[5] *EIC*, p.239.
[6] Interview with P Jairaj.
[7] *EIC*, p.119.
[8] A film like *Shiraz* has much in common with the visual style of Joe May's *Indische Grabmal* films made in 1921.

The career of RR Gharekhan, onetime manager of the Excelsior studios, is symbolic of the rapidity with which people changed quarters or freelanced for several organisations at the same time. In 1928, he was directing films for Jagtap Pictures and moved along with the crew to Vivekananda Pictures in 1930, while continuing as director at Navjawan Pictures. In between he managed to direct lone ventures for a number of small production companies.[9] Capital was forthcoming in this period and increasing demand ensured that everyone was kept busy.

The studio came to stand for a family unit, a closely-knit group of technicians and performers and other workers.[10] As the studio became a professionalised space allowing people from various backgrounds to work together under the stewardship of 'respectable' directors and producers, middle-class attitudes towards the industry changed. Increased location shooting added to the cosmopolitan visibility of the studios. The star phenomenon and increased publicity in this period undoubtedly helped studios to handle a variety of tastes with greater confidence. This was most visible in the films produced between 1928 and 1933.

Cosmopolitan Bombay Cinema, 1928-1935

There was a move towards a cosmopolitan filmmaking style that partially translated Hollywood film styles into Bombay cinema. Imperial's advertisements mimicked those of the big Hollywood studios which advertised films alongside reputations of studios and stars.[11] The new breed of stars had a more urbane outlook as can be evinced from Dinshaw Bilimoria's cowboy outfits in his films. A description of film production at Sharda observed that 'The heroine had sacrificed her girlish modesty and dressed up in trousers and a moustache in an endeavour to save the bemused juvenile.'[12] The Surya Film Company in Bangalore was opened by Gujarati entrepreneurs from Bombay exclusively for the production of cosmopolitan stunt films.[13] The Wadia brothers made a series of films that translated *The Mark of Zorro* into a cinematic argot of Oriental regalia, bourgeois drama and Hollywood stunt cinema that was unique to Bombay.[14]

Simultaneously, there was increasing traffic between Bombay cinema and Islamicate culture. Although Bombay cinema had from the beginning been influenced by the Parsi stage, the latter half of the 1920s saw the industry turning more directly towards the Islamicate Oriental costume adventure of the Parsi stage style. In the late silent and early talkie period, the ethos of the Parsi theatre was evoked through the elaborate Orientalised settings of the films as well as through the language of the intertitles. In the context of Bombay cinema, the term 'Oriental' is used for a particular cinematic mode of address that utilised the spectacle of adventure against semi-historical settings marked by a particular configuration of dress, décor, action and sexuality that evoked, in most cases, the Islamicate atmosphere of *bazaar* towns and cities. Krishna made their very successful serial *Hatim Tai* in 1929. The celebrated playwright Narayan Prasad 'Betaab' joined Ranjit in the early 1930s to script some of the most famous talkies of this period, including *Devi Devyani*, *Radha Rani*, *Sati Savitri* and *Miss 1933*.[15] The Oriental ethos of these films, borrowing from

[9] Information from *LOA*.
[10] Interview with Homi Wadia.
[11] For example, the advertisements for Imperial in *SV* special issues in the 1930s.
[12] 'Indian Films, Vamps at Work', *TOIS*, p.67.
[13] Interview with Virchand Dharamsey.
[14] *EIC*, p.238.
[15] *EIC*, p.58.

the practices of the Parsi theatre, was heavily Islamicate. This Urduised Oriental tilt of the late silents is evident from the titles of Sulochana and Bilimoria's films in this period – *Khwab-e-Hasti*, *Noor-e-Alam*, *Khuda ki Shaan*, *Diwani Dilbar*, *Baghdad-nu Bulbul*.[16] The costume adventure tales added to and refined the stunt films that until now had focused mainly on Gujarati Rajput princely styles. Now Rajput ideals were depicted through an ornate Mughal-Rajput courtly ethos. Film production in this period moved towards extravaganzas.

A double register of Westernisation and simultaneous Orientalisation distinguished the post-1928 production order. The Sharda or Imperial adventure-romance films were a mix of norms borrowed from Hollywood and the Parsi theatre. The model 'was the Hollywood film, adapted to include the Parsi Theatre's tradition of costume-musical play. Films depended more on the singing appeal of pretty-looking women and the exploits of debonair males.'[17] Sulochana was a star considered to have 'amazing originality coupled with Western acting style'.[18] Stills from *Daku ki Ladki* (Imperial, 1933) depicted her in shirt and 'Arab'-style headscarf (the style popularised by Rudolph Valentino), a hybrid costume mixing Hollywood and Islamicate motifs.[19] This was the dominant sartorial style for the adventure romance film, a tradition continued in Wadia Movietone's Hunterwali series of films featuring Fearless Nadia.[20] This points towards a little-discussed paradigm of Indian modernisation that was popular from the 1920s to the first half of the 1930s – a vision of India based on the model of aligning modernisation with traditions of the Muslim past.[21] Dominant scholarly viewpoints about modernisation have either emerged from studies of British India or have focused exclusively on the political and social aspects of Muslim society, thus bypassing the realities of the princely states of north and western India altogether, or have failed to take cognisance of the influence of successor state culture on modernising Muslims and, indeed, amongst the upper classes of north-west India in general. In a period when films were increasingly slanted towards a north Indian film market, Bombay cinema's history after 1928 points directly towards such a modernisation paradigm based on an Islamicate past, emerging from heavily urbanised north Indian regions and certain cosmopolitan urban groups like the Parsis.

In this period, the costume drama took centrestage in Bombay production schedules. In 1929, 52 costume dramas were produced against 32 socials. The next year, 90 costume dramas were made, while the number of socials dropped to 21. In 1931, the year the talkies were introduced, 105 costume dramas were produced. Only 20 socials were made that year.[22] The paradigm was powerful enough to influence producers as diverse as Himansu Rai and Ardeshir Irani to produce elaborate costume dramas at the same time. If historical cinema was being used to construct modern

[16] Information from *EIC*.
[17] IA Rahman, 'Blockbusters, Matinee Idols…', http://www.dawn.com/events/millennium/23.htm
[18] *VW*, May 13, 1933, p.5-6.
[19] *TC*, May 1933, p.20.
[20] Interview with Homi Wadia.
[21] Kathryn Hansen's recent discussion of Sulochana's stardom alludes to the fact that fair-skinned Eurasian heroines might have confirmed to Islamicate models. However, her main argument undercuts this reading and prefers to see Sulochana as the embodiment of the fantasy to dress up fair-skinned women 'as a good Hindu girl, a mythological heroine, rural damsel, or dutiful city wife'. Kathryn Hansen, 'Making Women Visible: Gender and Race Cross-Dressing in the Parsi Theatre', *Theatre Journal*, v.51, no.2, 1999, p.146.
[22] Calculated on the basis of the filmography in *LOA*.

identities, Bombay cinema of the late 1920s definitely reflected the concerns of an elite interested in utilising the Islamicate past of India for this purpose.

The Cultural Context for Cosmopolitan Bombay Cinema

The immediate cultural context for cosmopolitan cinema was provided by the efflorescence of Urduised popular culture in Bombay and north India, most notably in Lahore. The rise of Urdu modernism in Punjab was centred around the Gowalmandi, Anarkali and Mall Road areas of colonial Lahore. This was the age when Iqbal espoused a fusion of Islam, Marxism and modernism. It was also the age of Imtiaz Ali Taj, writer of *Anarkali* and scenarist of the film version of the play by the Great Eastern Corporation – *The Loves of a Mughal Prince*. For a short while, he was a director at Silvertone Talkies Limited in Lahore.[23] The career of Imtiaz Taj is emblematic of the kind of Islamicate modernisation sweeping Punjab in the latter half of the 1920s. His father, Maulvi Mumtaz Ali, owned the Darul Isha'at Press on Sabzimandi Road. His mother Muhammadi Begum was the editor of one of the first progressive women's journals in Lahore – *Tehzeeb-i-Niswaan*. The Darul Isha'at press also published *Phool*, the most popular children's magazine in Urdu, filled with adventure stories that fused the sensibilities of the *qissa-dastaan* genre with those of imported comic-book literature.[24]

Taj himself wrote realist short stories and had an abiding interest in Parsi Theatre (in later life, he edited the definitive anthology of Parsi plays). *Anarkali*, considered the masterpiece of the new wave of Urdu drama that fused Western realism with the Parsi play ethos, was a product of the new Urdu modern artistic ethos of Lahore. Indeed, Lahore was a great consumer of Parsi theatre. Some of the Parsi theatre companies in Lahore were Globe Theatre of Punjab, Prem Pracharni Natak Mandali and Punjab Reforming Theatrical Company.[25] Its renowned Bazaar painters specialised in making backdrops for Parsi theatricals. Painters like Allah Bux, Hussain Bux and Hari Singh worked for both theatre and film companies.[26] Allah Bux straddled multiple worlds. Picking up his early training with master miniaturists in Lahore, he became a painter for Aga Hashr's plays. He then moved to Bombay in 1914 and came under the influence of JJ School of Art-type paintings at the Bombay Art Studio. Returning to Lahore in the 1920s, he became a commercial painter and print-maker, painting for patrons and illustrating journals, magazines and books. By 1930, students were seeking him out in his studio around the same time they were beginning to watch films with backdrops painted by Hari Singh. Allah Bux had thus, by the age of 35, covered the entire transition from Parsi theatre to cinema.[27]

In another register, popular literature in Urdu was being influenced by pulp fiction from the West. The most substantial Urdu novels were adaptations of the works of writers like Edgar Wallace. Zafar Umar's *Nili Chhatri*, *Bahram ki Giraftari* and *Lal Kathor* were updates of imported adventure literature in Oriental settings many of which were published by Taj's Darul Isha'at Press.[28] Cosmopolitan Bombay

[23] RC Sawhney, 'Film Activities in Punjab', *TC*, Oct.1933, p.92.
[24] Aziz-ul-din Ahmed, 'Literary Storm Centers', *Daily Dawn*, internet edition.
[25] Ranvir Singh (ed.), *Parsi Theatre* (Jodhpur, 1998), p.150.
[26] Hari Singh worked for Madan, Pioneer and Royal film companies in the 1930s. KC Aryan, *Punjab Painting* (Patiala, 1975), pp.26-27.
[27] Marcella C Sirhindi, 'Allah Bux (1895-1975): A Lahore Painter of Punjabi Culture and Rural Life', *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, v.5, no.2, July-Dec., 1998, pp.213-215.
[28] Shaista Akhtar Banu Suhrawardy (Begum Ikramullah), *A Critical Survey of the Development of the Urdu Novel and Short Story* (London, 1945), p.94.

cinema fused the sensibilities of pulp fiction and modern Parsi theatre to provide stirring entertainment for the Punjab audiences. Taj's interest in both worlds is evident from his dual authorship of adventure stories for children and classicised historical plays.

Urdu literary practice itself provided the wherewithal to reconcile the adventurous and the historical through the genre of *masnawi* poetry. This poetry, a product of the Urdu romantic literary movement in Delhi and Lucknow in the nineteenth century, fused spirituality with images of romantic heroic action in the quest for love and wealth. Over time, it inspired a range of cultural products from courtly *masnawi*s to *bazaar* romances. It included the *qissa-dastaan* tradition based on the lives of such heroes as Amir Hamza.[29] Indeed, the Arabian Nights can be considered an elaboration of the *masnawi* sentiment.

The *masnawi* poetic genre and the influence of popular Western literature may be considered the generating matrix of popular realist Indian fiction. It has been little stressed by historians of Indian literature that Lucknow's Nawal Kishore Press were the first mass publishers of popular fiction in Urdu and the first in any language. The *afsana* literature of Dewan Sharar (1860-1926) and Ratnanath Sharshar (1846-1902) fused the sentiments of the *masnawi* and realist novelistic techniques to describe the world of decadent *nawabs* (Sharar's *Husn ka Daku* and *Asrar-i-Darbari-Harampur*),[30] modern heroes who fought the Russians in Turkey (Sharshar's *Fasana-i-Azad*)[31] and erotic romance. Indeed, the *Lakhnawi* tradition of *masnawi* literature was looked down upon by the Delhi tradition for its eroticism. Sharshar is said to have "made the ladies of good families talk like 'Tavaefs'".[32] The connection between *masnawi* literature and performative genres was further elaborated when Parsi theatre adapted a number of *masnawis*, most notably Mirza Shauq's *Zahr-i-Ishq* adapted by his grandson Ahsan Lakhnawi for the Alfred Theatrical Company in the late nineteenth century as *Akhiri Mulaqat urf Yadgar-i-Shauq*.[33] The atmosphere of the cosmopolitan adventure film (itself derived from the Parsi theatre tradition) may be seen as an extension of the heroic *masnawi* tradition. The fusion of the adventurous, the exotic and the erotic in the cosmopolitan was thus in line with established urban tradition in Urdu literary practice.

The rise of Urdu popular culture was not restricted to the Muslims. Despite Hindu revivalism and the concurrent strengthening of the Hindi movement, much of popular culture in north and north-west India remained under the sway of Urduised Hindustani. Popular Hinduism was restricted to the religious elite and a very limited section of the bourgeoisie. 'In the Western districts of the United Provinces Urdu was taught. Even Hindus generally studied Urdu and Persian. More than that, they even read Hindu sacred books in Urdu.'[34] Much of Hindu popular culture was expressed in Urdu until the 1920s. The 1931 Census revealed that in Punjab, both Hindus and Muslims were increasingly giving up Punjabi in favour of Urdu and Hindi. The confusion created by the strong bilingualism involving Urdu and Hindi amongst the

[29] On the role of the *masnawi* in the Urdu prose tradition, see Suhrawardy (1945).
[30] Suhrawardy (1945), p.81.
[31] Suhrawardy (1945), p.33.
[32] Suhrawardy (1945), p.37.
[33] Anna A Suvorova, *Masnawi: A Study of Urdu Romance*, (trans.) M Osama Faruqi (Karachi, 2000), p.221.
[34] Lakshminarayan Sudhanshu, *Hindi Sahitya ka Brihat Itihas*, v. III, Pt. I (Banaras, 1957), quoted in Robert O Swan, *Munshi Premchand of Lamhi Village* (Durham, 1969), p.37.

Punjabis forced the authorities to club speakers of both languages as Hindustani speakers.[35] However, the number of Urdu speakers was 'double that of literates in other vernaculars put together'.[36] Urdu remained the predominant cultural force in terms of text production, accounting for more than half the books produced in the regional languages of the province. The 1920s registered a increase of over 50 percent in the Urdu book trade.[37] Both Hindus and Muslims contributed to this production. Indeed, it was the use of Arabic or Sanskrit – the scriptural languages – that lent a Islamic or Hindu flavour to cultural production.[38] The use of Urdu was not in itself a cultural marker of religious or cultural distinction.

Most of the Parsi theatre companies in north Indian towns like Meerut, Bareilly, Kanpur, Ajmer, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Agra and Aligarh were owned by Hindus. They had a mix of Muslim and Hindu directors and performers.[39] Actor-directors like Laksmandas Dangi and proprietors like Babu Maniklal Dangi in Rajputana had been trained in the leading Parsi theatrical companies in Bombay and Calcutta.[40] An actor like Mulchandji Marwadi acted in Urdu plays in Sind.[41] BP Misra, leading director at Kohinoor and Imperial, had trained under Athar Ali during his stint with the Vyakul Bharat Theatrical Company in Meerut.[42] KL Saigal, the first superstar of the talkies, earned his living in Simla in the 1930s by singing the *Ramayana* in Urdu.[43] Thus Urdu remained the *lingua franca* of popular cultural performances in north India, patronised and performed by Hindus and Muslims alike.

Within cinema too, there was a remarkably high participation of Hindus and Muslims in each others' cultural production from the earliest times. The screenplay of a film with a dominant Urdu content like Arvind Cinetone's *Noor-e-Iman* (1933) was by a Mr. Sharma, MA – 'learned editor of Swadhin Bharat'.[44] Such collaborations were the norm rather than the exception. Mukhtar – a famous songstress from Punjab – was the lead player in Madan's *Ramayana*.[45] The early talkie star casts are replete with countless such examples. Gohar, the lead actress at Ranjit – a studio famed for producing Hindu socials – recalled that the twin requirements for a 'Talkie role' were the ability to deliver Urdu dialogues and to render songs.[46]

With the coming of sound and the extensive use of song and dance, the traffic between the Urdu stage and cinema further increased. New companies specialising in Urdu films came up in Lahore, Karachi and Delhi. One such company was the Delhi Movietone Company Limited under Masih-ul-Mulk Hakeem Mohammed Jamil Khan Sahib, Rais Azam, Delhi which promised to reproduce the 'refined taste and highest pitch of Urdu literature'.[47] A casual perusal of the advertisements in the early sound

[35] *CI*, 1931, v. XVII, p. iv.
[36] *CI*, 1931, v. XVII, p.260.
[37] *CI*, 1931, v. XVII, p.281.
[38] For the use of Arabic as the distinguishing Islamic feature of the Urdu romance literature, see Christopher Shackle, 'Between Scripture and Romance: The Yusuf-Zuleikha Story in Panjabi', *South Asian Research*, v. 15, no.2, 1995.
[39] Singh (1998), p.150-151.
[40] Singh (1998), p.153, p.160.
[41] Singh (1998), p.157.
[42] Singh (1998), p.150.
[43] Gayatri Pagdi, 'The Man, The Legend', *Sunday Observer*, 9 Apr.,1995.
[44] *TC*, Aug.1933, p.20.
[45] *BC*, 18 Nov., 1934.
[46] 'Technical Excellence and Thematic Weakness: Miss Gohar's Survey of Three Decades', *ITSJ*, p.125.
[47] *TC*, Sept.1933, p.57.

era establishes that the Urduised costume melodrama dominated film production. Films like Ajanta's *Afzal*, Sagar's *Zarina* or the early Wadiatone films were great hits. New companies used Urduised cinema as the main selling ploy. Amar Cinetone produced an Urdu talkie – *Cupid's Curse* – in 1933 starring Miss Sultana, 'famous dancer and songstress of Cawnpore'.[48] Jayant Cinetone produced the Parsi theatre classic *Zahr-e-Ishq* the same month.[49] *Kismat ka Shikar*, produced by Pioneer Film Company, Calcutta, had music that was 'enchanting for the Urdu lover'.[50]

Significantly, the early talkies saw a deluge of Muslim actors and actresses into the industry. This trend had begun in the late 1920s. As mentioned earlier, Sulochana regularly received letters 'from up-country', especially from Muslim students, for advice on joining the industry. The growth of professional interest in films reflected the entrenchment of the film habit for Bombay cinema 'up-country'. The craze for public performance was part of the adventurous mood of *bazaar* culture, one that formed the base of its narratives as well. Master Fida Hussain described the mania for the Parsi-Urdu stage in north India:

> It so happened that as a result of their enormous popularity familymen grew distressed whenever some theatre company visited their town… Once Manikchand's company came to Moradabad. People got so frightened that their sons would be ruined they petitioned the *sarkar* to send back the company. Since there were no rules nothing happened… And why should they the people not go mad? The plays of their choice – religious, historical or romantic, songs, dances and miracles.[51]

Fida Hussain went on to act in the talkies in the 1940s.

Muslim performers such as Jamshedji Khan, Mazhar Khan, Gul Hamid and Noor Mohammed Charlie were already active in Bombay in the late 1920s. With the coming of the talkies, Muslim actors and actresses were at a premium because of their skills in dialogue delivery and singing and dancing. The roster of any Bombay film company in this period was dominated by Muslims. Najamul Hassan, Master Mohammed, WM Khan, Ashraf Khan, Rafique Ghaznavi, Nissar, Kajjan and Jaddan Bai are only a few of the big names that dominated the early talkie scene. There were also performers like Master Yakub Khan, 'a well known songster of Bombay' appearing in Shree Mahalaxmi Cinetone's *Panjab ki Padmini* (1933).[52] Side roles, too, went to Muslim performers as in *Alif Layla* (1933), featuring Zohra and Bashir.[53] Nor was the dominance of Muslim stars restricted to the Arabian Nights-type films. Afzal Bai – famous songstress and radio star – appeared with Gulam Mohammed in Gold Mohur's social *To-day* (1934).[54]

Not surprisingly, the iconography of the cosmopolitan adventure-romance film was heavily characterised by Islamicate motifs. Sharda produced a large number of costume stunt classics of the Arabian Nights type featuring Master Vithal[55] in this period, and as mentioned earlier, Imperial produced a number of Islamicate adventure-romance film centred around Sulochana. This led critics in the early talkie

[48] *BC*, 21 May, 1933.
[49] *BC*, 21 May, 1933
[50] *BC*, 10 Mar., 1934.
[51] Hussain (1986), pp.13-14.
[52] *BC*, 21 May, 1933.
[53] *BC*, 30 July, 1933.
[54] *BC*, 28 July, 1934.
[55] *EIC*, p.215.

period to lament the fact that films aimed at a Muslim audience had become 'the order of the day' courtesy of companies like Wadia and Ajanta.[56] The critic's view revealed the extent to which an Urduised Islamicate ethos pervaded Bombay cinema. Even a film like Ajanta's *Rangila Rajput*, set in a Rajput ethos, displayed Islamicate elements of décor, dress and dialogue.[57] *Prithviraj-Sanjogita* made by Maharashtra Cinetone Company, the talkie successor to Maharashtra Film Company, reputed for its creation of authentic historical sets for Hindu historical films, had shown the Rajput heroine Sanjogita in *kameez* and *lehenga* – definite borrowings from an Islamicate-Punjabi cultural ethos.[58] Or for that matter, a film with a Urdu name like *Dukhtar-e-Hind* was actually billed as a 'Rajput Romance'.[59] Sagar's *Meerabai* – a film that would qualify as a Hindu historical – was criticised for casting Jal Merchant as Krishna since he was Parsi and 'not oriental enough'. More importantly, there should have been 'more of Rajput than Muslim style', said the reviewer.[60] A Rajput historical film like *Panna Ratna* was advertised in the *Chronicle* in Islamic calligraphic style.[61]

This was hardly surprising considering that most of these films were set against the backdrop of north Indian princely states that were heavily influenced by Mughal courtly culture. Much of classical music, almost entirely in the hands of Muslim performers, was patronised by Hindu kings. Cities like Jaipur were thriving centres of Parsi-Urdu-style theatre.[62] Indeed, the Islamicate touch to Sharda's stunt films came more from the Persianate architectural and sartorial styles of the Rajputs themselves. Linguistically too, the courts still followed the Mughal courtly ethic. A substantial section of Muslims in Punjab were Rajputs and the Rajputana Rajputs themselves were only ambiguously Hindu. At the 1931 Census, Muslim groups in Punjab like the *nais*, *julahas* and *mirasis* were returning themselves as Rajputs.[63]

The other marker of Islamicate cultural ethos in popular theatre and cinema was dance in the form of the courtesan's art (popularly referred to as *nautch*). In scholarly discourse and public perception, *nautch* was deemed a corrupt element in a pure spiritual Hindu tradition now sullied by the impact of Muslim rule and colonial commercialism. For example, Prodyot Kumar Tagore observed:

> The modern nautch-girl dances of India are, I believe, of Persian origin; their spirit is so different from that of our ancient classical dances that we cannot infer their system of dancing is purely of Indian origin. The nautch-girls of the present day with their so-called artificial grace (if I be allowed to use such an expression) and covered feet, have, in my humble opinion, no true classical grace in them and make a horrible sight.[64]

For Tagore, the connection between Islam, feudalism and the corruption of Indian culture by *nautch* was all too clear. Otto Rothfeld's description of the costumes of *nautch* women bears out this connection:

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[56] *VW*, 23 Feb., 1934, pp. 9-10.
[57] *BC*, 16 Sept., 1933.
[58] *BC*, 15 July, 1933.
[59] *BC*, 24 Mar., 1934.
[60] *FL*, 18 June, 1932, p.15.
[61] *BC*, 22 Nov., 1930.
[62] See Singh (1998).
[63] *CI*, 1931, v. XVII, p.iv.
[64] Maharaj Kumar Prodyot Kumar Tagore, *Divine Music Before Divine Mosques* (Calcutta, 1926), p.57.

> It is the full dress of the Mussulman lady, that, except in Southern India, the dancing girl has made her own for professional uses and embellished with every device of pattern and every richness of material.[65]

By the 1930s, the *nautch* was being adapted to new forms of presentation, a trend that suited cosmopolitan cinema. Stage-dancing, already an important public-entertainment form, was a routine affair by the 1930s. In 1931, halls like Olympia and the ROH advertised live dancing. Early in January, Olympia advertised 'Stage Dance by Beautiful Dancers with Songs and Music' and the ROH announced the stage dance of Miss Fatma.[66] By 1932, a film magazine remarked that, 'every heroine turns to stage dancing'.[67]

These stage dances contained a mix of Oriental and Western influences. This was to be expected in the light of the hybrid nature of the performative calendar at a site like the ROH; one that mixed stage turns by companies from all over the world on their way to the Pacific Rim entertainment circuit with stage performances by local Bombay companies. The ROH featured the 'Electric Dance' and 'Candle Dance' in addition to the 'Marwari', 'Indian', 'Turkish', 'Arabic', 'Egyptian', 'Dog' and 'Comic' dances.[68] The dances in the early talkie films were, if Sitara Devi is to be believed, a hybrid of Orientalised dance forms set to Western music.[69] For the critics, an appreciation of the mix of *nautch* and progressive Westernisation of dance in cinema was a symptom of the new generation's adoption of the 'occidental touch' to romance.[70]

Popular cinema used Islamicate and modern motifs in combinations that spanned the entire generic gamut from heavily Islamicate Arabian Nights cinema to a more incidental use of Islamicate symbols in romance-adventure films that partially depended on the geographical setting of action films (Rajasthan or north India), and partially on inter-generic differentiation. The Arabian Nights cinema used classicised dialogue, décor, dance and music and in the case of Bombay cinema, became increasingly related to mystical themes. The adventure-romance film on the other hand presented a more cosmopolitan ethos. Indeed, Wadia's *Lal-e-Yaman*, that could qualify as an Arabian Nights film, mixed mysticism, action and romance in the same narrative in ways not too dissimilar from an action film like *Hunterwali*. The 1933 version of *Alif Laila* (Arabian Nights), was advertised as 'a mix of romance and adventure' with a 'thrilling climax' featuring a 'fight with magic', emphasising yet again the sliding scale of narrational motifs along the generic spectrum.[71] Likewise, the music in adventure films, like Wadia's *Hunterwali*, infused the films with a more classical tone. Popular cinema was trying to fuse modern action sequences with a classical tone through a division of labour between talking and singing parts. The latter would suddenly transform the frivolous hero and heroine into romantic lovers of a classical type. *Hunterwali*'s Islamicate flavour was due to its music and declamatory style directly borrowed from the Urdu stage. What united the genres for the audiences was the shared world of Urdu popular culture that provided the immediate inspiration

[65] Otto Rothfeld, *Women of India* (Bombay, 1928), p.190.
[66] *BC*, Jan.3, 1931.
[67] *FL*, 18 June, 1932, p.8.
[68] *BC*, 10 Jan., 1931.
[69] *BC*, 14 Apr., 1934.
[70] *FL*, 4 Feb., 1933, p.13.
[71] *TC*, Aug.1933, p.7.

for both kinds of film. The horse-riding whip-cracking fair-skinned heroine was a direct descendant of the heroines from a Parsi theatre play or a Sharshar novel.[72]

Under the influence of modernisers like Imtiaz Ali Taj, Bombay cosmopolitan cinema's imagery combined urban dandy heroes, Oriental scenarios and erotic heroines like Sulochana. The characters and events in a *masnawi*-inspired Sharshar novel could be an ideal synopsis of a Bombay cosmopolitan film of the period – princes and peasants, dancing girls, hypocritical *sheikhs*, hangers-on, loungers, petty bourgeois with petty morality, elopements, burglaries, rows and brawls.[73] Jayant's *Zahr-e-Ishq* (1933) was advertised for its 'deadly intrigues in the background of great monarchy', 'shocking stunts' and 'several dance pieces' and featured bandits, princes and princesses, *fakirs*, evil ministers and dancing girls, very similar to a Sharshar plot.[74] Ajanta's *Afzal* (1933) was about the abduction of the heroine by tax-collectors followed by court intrigues, multiple romances and the usual fare of stunts and exotic dances.[75] The advertisement for Ajanta's *Azadi ke Deewane* (1935) stressed 'its atmosphere of Baghdad – with its slaves and dancing girls of old, its bazaars, Bedouins, crowds and spices', evoking the adventurous landscape of a Sharshar-type *bazaar* town.[76] Indeed, *Hunterwali* is an ideal example of the formula: a pastiche of the Arabian Nights-type film, the *masnawi*, the Douglas Fairbanks stunt film and the Pearl White serial film all rolled into one.

The Audience for Cosmopolitan Cinema

Cosmopolitan cinema marked Bombay's new engagement with north Indian audiences in thrall of the courtly practices of the post-Mughal successor states. A long history of urbanisation had fostered lively urban cultures with a taste for the arts, inculcated through contact with courtly cultures and later through the impact of cultural institutions like the Parsi theatre. Attitudes to cinema in such towns reflected this urbane sensibility. Even though the elite of these regions actively took to European literature, they retained an active interest in the courtly culture of poetry and courtesans.

The reform of the courtly elite led to further laicisation of courtly culture in north Indian towns. As courts broke up and the bourgeoisie increasingly laid claim to high culture, there was a rise in the public patronage of cultural performance. This is evident from the sudden and dramatic emergence of urban folk traditions like the *nautanki* all over north India. Public stage dancing and singing increased as members of *kothas* and sections of the middle classes took to public performance in the cities. Thus the late 1920s and the early 1930s saw a confluence of two cultural movements – one coming down from the break-up of courtly culture and the other rising from new-fangled bourgeois cultural practices.[77] Binding these phenomena together was the culture of the cities. Substantial urban populations in the north could partake of the

[72] This historical reading of the adventure-romance heroine seeks to revise the cultural genealogy attributed to heroines like Nadia that seeks to locate her in line with Hindu goddesses like Kali. This attribution is all the more startling in the light of JBH Wadia's explicit statement about creating the Hunterwali persona to oppose traditional Hindu feminine iconography. Behroze Gandhy and Rosie Thomas, 'Three Indian Film Stars' in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Stardom: Industry Of Desire* (London, 1991).
[73] Suhrawardy (1948), p.31.
[74] *BC*, 20 May, 1933.
[75] *TC*, Sept.1933, pp.32-34.
[76] *BC*, 1 Dec., 1935.
[77] On this phenomenon in 1920s and 1930s, see Pran Nevile, *Lahore: A Sentimental Journey* (Delhi, 1999).

laicisation of culture since the cultural distance between the elite and the masses was less than in the newer metropolitan cities.[78] The emulation of elite patterns of cultural consumption by the lower classes was not censored as in the big cities. What was furtive in Bombay and Calcutta was openly celebrated in these regions. With the rapid influx of capital and talent into these towns in the 1930s, and the proliferation of public performance, substantial numbers gained access to forms of elite cultural performance.[79] More than class, it was a civic identity which bound these audiences together.

The cross-class attraction of Bombay cinema in the north was evident from its large-scale patronage by students *and* the lower classes. For cinema-hall owners in Lahore, students were the most lucrative patrons of the exhibition business. Holidays meant bad business, as most students went back to their villages or home-towns. Ambalal Pandya of the Universal Pictures Corporation of Lahore stated, 'College students are the backbone of the cinemas in Lahore.'[80] Students went to cinema halls of all classes, making up 40 percent of the attendance.[81] CR Ghosh, editor of the Calcutta film weekly *Filmland*, visiting Lahore to promote New Theatres' *Puran Bhakt*, praised Majestic cinema's manager for releasing the film in term time and thus ensuring the huge success of the film.[82] Government College, Lahore, had, in the 1930s, an Information Bureau to 'recommend good films to those who asked for advice on the subject' (in addition to helping students recover lost bicycles and have old shoes repaired!).[83] The popularity of activities like debating waned as 'it became fashionable for the collegians to spend their evenings in picture houses or musical concerts.'[84]

Diwan Bahadur Raja Narendranath, a member of the Punjab board of film censors, observed that cinema was replacing *nautch* as entertainment for men.[85] Cosmopolitan cinema's popularity was due to the fact that people in Punjab were interested 'in stories of romance and chivalry'.[86] Cinema, with its exotic heroine and her dancing was becoming analogous to older forms of entertainment like *nautch*. There was an aura of urban sophistication in patronising the cinema. 'Both the high class and the cheaper class men enjoy it', observed HW Hogg, Secretary of the Punjab Boy's Scouts Association.[87] This is not to suggest that class differences were not significant in north Indian towns. What may be argued is that Bombay cinema was not a significant marker of class difference. The educated youth did not necessarily scoff at Bombay cinema or cinema derived from the Parsi theatre as lower class entertainment, as they did in Calcutta. Film reviews in *The Cinema*, published from Lahore, were always more charitable to Madan productions and Bombay film exotica than the Calcutta reviewers.

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[78] On the peculiar elite-popular interactive spectrum in the sphere of cultural performance, see Nita Kumar, *The Artisans of Banaras: Popular Culture and Identity, 1886-1986* (Berkeley, 1988).
[79] On the explosion of various commercialised popular rurban forms of entertainment in the 1920s and 1930s, see Ram Narayan Agarwal, *Saangit: Ek Loknatya Parampara* (Delhi, 1976).
[80] *ICCE*, v. II, p.178.
[81] *ICCE*, v. II, p.81.
[82] *VW*, Mar.11, 1933, p.13.
[83] HLO Garrett and Abdul Hamid, *A History of the Government College, Lahore, 1864-1964* (Lahore, 1964), p.199.
[84] Garrett and Hamid (1964), p.189.
[85] *ICCE*, v. II, p.139.
[86] *ICCE*, v. II, p.96.
[87] *ICCE*, v. II, p.68.

The younger generation's taste for films in Punjab was a result of the modernisation of the province in the post-War period. The Chairman of the ICC proceedings observed that more people in Punjab were 'acquainted with the ways of the West than in other provinces'. There was more 'English style dressing' in the province.[88] Nevile provides a graphic description of the changes in lifestyles in Lahore in the late 1920s and the 1930s. By the early 1930s, *pugris* had lost out to caps.[89] Dandies sported outlandish clothes of unusual colour and cut.[90] By the late 1930s, young men had 'more or less completely changed to English mode of dress'. Women too had modernised their dress. Indeed, the students of Government College, Lahore were likened to 'coloured butterflies' by the sterner sections of Lahore society.[91] Cosmopolitan cinema reflected the values of the rapidly modernising classes of regions like Punjab that mixed 'dandies with outlandish clothes', Mughal courtly values and sexual romance. Stunts, romance and courtly grandeur co-existed with ease in films that embodied the elite reconstruction of a modern society based on invoking historical traditions.

Differences in attitudes towards cultural performance translated into different attitudes towards the public visibility of women on stage and on screen. Given regional cultural variation, reform and modernisation affected women in differently in different parts of the subcontinent. The 1930s saw women in Punjab going public more freely and, if Nevile is to be believed, their attitude towards cosmopolitanism and public culture was a relaxed one.[92] One of the respondents to the ICC said that women from Punjab were most likely to come out and act in the movies.[93] In north-west India, where the vogue was for films 'based on love stories', the availability of well-trained female performers went a long way to increase the attractions of cinema. In the view of Khan Bahadur Muzaffar Khan, Director of Information Bureau, Punjab, people wanted 'love stories, since without a woman, it ceases to be attractive.'[94] Jaddan Bai was fond of motoring, swimming and tennis, and set the pace for a new kind of stardom.[95]

An additional feature of the new audiences was an increase in the number of Muslims, a trend visible in all cities of the subcontinent. Muslims dominated the skilled and semi-skilled labour market in north Indian towns and with their disposable incomes and leisure time they were the most likely amongst the working classes to become regular patrons of the cinema.[96] Almost all immigrant labourers in Bombay from Punjab and UP were Muslim.[97] The Census of 1931 remarked that 'the most important growth [was] the stream from the Punjab and North India'.[98] This made Hindustani the strongest subsidiary language in the Presidency, spoken by 42.4 percent of the population in 1931.[99] In Bombay, only the halls in the mill areas and

[88] *ICCE*, v. II, p.70.
[89] Nevile (1999), p.233.
[90] Nevile (1999), p.243.
[91] Garrett and Hamid (1964), p.206.
[92] Nevile (1999), p.241.
[93] *ICCE*, v. III, p.897.
[94] *ICCE*, v. II, p.14.
[95] *TC*, Sept.-Oct.1932, p.10.
[96] Sarojini Ganju, 'The Muslims in Lucknow' in Kenneth Ballhatchet and John Harrison (eds.), *The City in South Asia, Pre-modern and Modern* (London, 1980), p.281.
[97] *CI*, 1931, v. IX, p.23.
[98] *CI*, 1931, v. IX, pp.17-18.
[99] *CI*, 1931, v. IX, p.38.

suburbs had a clear preponderance of Hindus audiences.[100] Elsewhere, there seems to have been a substantial Muslim audience for Bombay films, a fact made all the more clear by the absolute necessity of intertitling films in Urdu. In a city like Ahmedabad, the second biggest exhibition centre for Bombay films in the Presidency, they formed 'the bulk of the visitors'.[101] The Punjab proceedings of the ICC confirm the increasing presence of the Muslim working classes in cinema halls.[102] In Delhi too, the ICC recorded evidence showing large Muslim audiences.[103] According to Thomas A Falkner of St Stephens School, the 'Mussulman of the middle or the lower middle class form the bulk of the audience' in the cinema halls of the city.[104] There were halls catering exclusively to Muslims.[105] The spread of cinema into the Hindustani heartland and the increasing traffic of labour from these regions into the metropoles strengthened the cause of the Hindustani talkie.

The Cultural Location of the Cosmopolitan *Bazaar* Cinema

It is not surprising that JBH Wadia specialised in Arabian Nights-type films as well as in adventure movies. It is also worth recalling that the original impulse for both genres in the Indian context came from a Hollywood film that was both an adventure and an Arabian Nights-type film – *The Thief of Baghdad*. An affinity between the adventure film and classical romance was noted by Henri Basset, a French scholar of the Maghreb, in the early part of the last century. He compared the Arabian romance (definitely a forerunner of *The Arabian Nights*) to 'a mediocre cinematograph film' with its repetitiveness of heroism, marvellous rapidity of recovery, convenient helpers and unusual role-switching.[106] A later commentator compared the Arabian epic romance with a 'Perils of Pauline style of narrative', thus evoking the stunt serial genre of cinema 'of constant climaxes and last moment escapes' and opined that it 'may often weary the reader'.[107] In a similar vein, a review of the 1933 Bilimoria-Sulochana starrer, *Daku ki Ladki* declared that 'D Bilimoria's stunts will be appreciated by the masses, but boring for the classes'.[108]

What all these films did capture was the romance of the *bazaar*. Like the penny-dreadfuls that evoked the chaos of the market place in England and the *masnawi*-derived novels describing the life of north Indian *bazaar* towns, the adventure films caught the tenor of the hectic commercial and technological transformations of the Indian *bazaar*. If the Arabian romance epic wearies the reader it is because it lacks the crucial dynamic context of the storyteller's oral craft and the hectic atmosphere of the *bazaar*. The Imperial romances and those of Wadia in the 1930s sought to capture the dynamic transformation of social relations in Indian society under the impact of market and technology. The *bazaar* was where this transformation was taking place. The Wadia stunt films featured working-class characters and their hero was usually the urban dandy romancing the modern woman. The chaos of the *bazaar* was reflected in the porosity of symbolic registers, which allowed the urban dandy and the modern heroine to switch with ease between

[100] *ICCE*, v. I, p.1.
[101] *ICCE*, v. I, p.375.
[102] *ICCE*, v. II, p.230.
[103] *ICCE*, v. III, p.891.
[104] *ICCE*, v. IV, p.281.
[105] *ICCE*, v. III, p.894.
[106] Basset quoted in MC Lyons, *The Arabian Epic* (Cambridge, 1995), v. I, p.4.
[107] Lyons (1995), p.7.
[108] *TC*, Aug.1933, p.37

traditional and modern attire while fighting and romancing. The switch from a traditional Arabian Nights-type hero to a modern dandy within the same narrative was a function of the dynamics of the *bazaar*. Such movement across symbolic boundaries in search of work and romance signified an increasing breakdown of hierarchies in Indian society, facilitating freer interaction between men and women and necessitating quick switches of social roles in the rapidly changing urban landscape. It was the evocation of the *bazaar* ethos that was responsible for the Islamicate influences in the representational schema of popular cinema. The *bazaar* towns and cities of north India, of which Bombay was the largest, were repositories of post-Mughal successor state culture. The performance styles seen in the popular cinema in the 1930s were variants of Islamicate theatrical genres of the *bazaar*.

More importantly, this cinema was itself located in the *bazaar*. The cosmopolitan *bazaar* cinema melded into the hectic traffic outside. It fitted into the work schedule of the marketplace. People flowed into and out of the hall following the ebb and tide of the hectic economic and labour schedules in the *bazaar*, as did the characters on the screen. The audience read or heard about larger-than-life adventure heroes and heroines from stories told or published in the *bazaar*, read about thrilling real-life adventures in the newspapers, consumed folk musical and dance performances as well as the *fakir*'s discourse, saw the martial regalia of the princes and aristocrats on the streets, enjoyed the *tawaif*'s dances as well as Parsi and *nautanki* plays and watched Sulochana romances in the *bazaar*. Lahore's film culture was a *bazaar*-oriented one. Cinema halls were located mainly in two areas – the upmarket McLeod Road area and the more boisterous surroundings of Bhatti Gate. The clientele of the two types of halls roughly corresponded to the physical dispositions of the buildings themselves. While the McLeod Road halls with their better amenities were frequented largely by the middle-class gentry, the Bhatti Gate halls with corrugated iron sheet roofs were frequented by the working classes and students, including schoolchildren. The latter of course frequented the McLeod Road halls as well.

Lahore's film culture incorporated the din and culture of the *bazaar* into the film-watching experience. The films themselves were advertised in a performative style. The E Bilimoria-Mehtab starrer *Bhola Shikar* was publicised by the *dhindora* (kettle-drum) team of Jamal and Kamal in silk shirts, waistcoat, *salwar* and white turban, giving the whole affair an altogether festive look. Shows in the Bhatti Gate area were noisy events with canvassers outside shouting out the wares on display inside and insulting their counterparts working for other halls in the neighbourhood. Inside the halls, vendors circulated with cigarettes, boiled eggs, peanuts, *chilgoza*s (pine nuts) and sugar candy.

The culture was well connected with the thriving courtesan culture of the city. Many halls were located at the edge of Hira Mandi, the courtesan quarters of Lahore. In the mid-1930s, when the first wave of the talkie charm had waned, Bhatti Gate hall owners started live dance shows as an additional attraction. The top films were gobbled up by the up-market McLeod Road halls, forcing the down-market halls to resort to extra-cinematic attractions to spice up the show. Courtesans from the Hira Mandi area, like Sarla (who acted in films as well), danced at the Wellington before the show and during the intermission. The manager would wait for the crowd to get restive and then bring on the dancer. Crown Talkies responded by importing Sheela

from Calcutta, a dancer with Madan's.[109] But Sarla's popularity was unparalleled and she singlehandedly revived the box-office in the lean year of 1933.[110] By the 1930s, courtesans could be seen at restaurants and the 'mushrooming film studios of Lahore were always on the look-out for young female artistes.' The cinema, more than the theatre, 'came as a real breakthrough for them to display their talents.'[111] It was not surprising then that Ambalal Pandya of the Universal Pictures Corporation felt that in Lahore a film would not be popular 'unless there is a dancing scene'.[112]

What united the various film types was the general adventure-oriented mode of address of cosmopolitan *bazaar* cinema which in turn reflected the speculative and adventurous ethos of the *bazaar* itself. The composite yet individuated nature of film genres was acknowledged by the film companies. The advertisement for Ajanta's *Maya Jal* (1933), the company's third production, stated that each of the three films produced until then was made with an 'emphasis on different phase of entertainment'.[113] If its earlier production *Afzal* was 'taken from Arabian Nights',[114] *Maya Jal* was a 'blend of romance and comedy'.[115] What was common, however, was Parsi stage star Nissar, the general Islamicate ethos evoked through the music and décor and the adventure quest of the protagonist. Rather than stressing genre diversity as a thing in itself, the phases-of-entertainment approach sought to underline the connectivity between the genres. Taken as a single genre, the adventure film lacked frank spiritual values, but seen as part of a studio schedule that geared production towards a multi-generic output, it had its place alongside the spiritual Arabian Nights film that had its own quota of action and adventure. They simply belonged to a 'different phase of entertainment'. The Arabian Nights hero displayed very similar qualities to those demanded of the bourgeois film hero but appeared seasonally according to the studio's production schedule. Otherwise, he mutated into a more active hero in the adventure films that formed the grist of the popular cinema's mill. The popular cinema and its star, and the *bazaar* were, following Petr Bogatyrev, 'as any system of signs, fit to generate a full range of moods and sensations.'[116]

The Paradox of the Talkies

The Educated Middle Classes and The Talkies

The talkie boom was a result of a generalised craze for cinema amongst all sections of Indian society. *Alam Ara*'s legendary opening at Majestic cinema in Bombay is part of the city's folklore: it was mobbed for weeks and hall owners grew rich overnight.[117] TS Mahadeo, an agent of the Imperial company, recalled how the *Alam Ara* party touring South India was recognised by managers of distribution companies and cinema halls by the phrase 'Talkies, Talkies'. Railway guards delayed the departure of trains in honour of the 'Talkie people'. 'No harm if the train is delayed', he said, 'it is not because they are Second Class travellers, but because they are the Talkie people.'

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[109] Nevile (1999), pp.176-187.
[110] *TC*, Nov. 1933, p.13.
[111] Nevile (1999), p.108.
[112] *ICCE*, v. II, p.179.
[113] *BC*, 2 Dec., 1933.
[114] *BC*, 27 May, 1933.
[115] *BC*, 2 Dec., 1933.
[116] Quoted in FW Galan, 'Style as Significance: Yury Tynyanov's Semantics of Cinema' in Robert Louis Jackson and Stephen Rudy (eds.), *Russian Formalism: A Retrospective Glance* (Yale, 1985), p.289.
[117] 'Irani: The Pioneer Who Gave Tongue to Indian Screen', *ITSJ*, p.24.

Thousands thronged the cinemas and the party were met by people from all sections of society. People debated with them on issues of cinema and parties were held in their honour.[118] The 'talkie' rapidly became a part of quotidian Indian city life. Indeed, the 'talkie' is generally regarded as the beginning of the official history of Indian cinema. The silent era, from this point of view, is a quaint entity of the obscure past. This view is itself an indication of the nexus between the talkies and middle-class consciousness. For the middle classes, Indian and Bombay cinema began with the talkies.

The entry of the middle classes fundamentally altered the cultural configuration of Bombay cinema. From the mid-1930s onwards, a new class of filmmakers, producers and audiences guided the production regimes of the industry. Social films produced by bourgeois filmmakers became the acme of film production. The success of the early talkie socials produced in Bombay, Calcutta and Poona contributed to this take-over. As was seen in Chapter Four, the Bengal bourgeoisie became interested in cinema in order to translate experiments in social realism in other fields of cultural production into film. What needs to be emphasised is that the Bombay industry increasingly passed into the hands of a transregional elite consisting in the main of upper caste-upper class personnel, who over time took charge of the first centralised self-regulatory industrial organisations. The centralisation of film production was a result of the transformation of the economic infrastructure of the industry effected by the talkies. Talkies oriented the entire infrastructure of film distribution towards all-India audiences. The enormous all-India commercial success of the early talkies contributed in no uncertain manner to this transformation. The social film *circa* 1936 became the standardised product that managed to please the largest number of people everywhere. From now on, the industry had to think of the nation. Thus the ensuing narrative of the growth of the industry takes into account the heterogeneous regional composition of the industry and its audiences from the mid-1930s onwards which was nevertheless marked by a commonality of class interests. Most of the evidence for upper-class attitudes towards Bombay cinema comes from Bengal, yet, as will be seen in the concluding chapter, such views were shared by a large cross-section of industrial personnel and audiences, cutting across regions.

The Rise of the Singing Star

Paradoxically, the talkies brought the world of the popular theatre back to the centrestage of cinema. The first few years of the talkies were dominated by the singing stars borrowed from the stage world of song and dance. Madan made a brief but eventful comeback with his talkies featuring Master Nissar and Jahanara Kajjan, erstwhile stars of the stage at his Elphinstone Theatrical Company. There was a deluge of singers and dancers into the cinema world, as studios realised that what sold best was the voice and dancing skill of the stars. The stars of the stage and the gramophone companies like Nissar, Kajjan, Jaddanbai, Gohar Karnataki, Master Mohammed, Rafique Ghaznavi were central to the success of the early talkies. In addition, these stars were favoured for the accuracy of their diction in Urduised Hindustani – the language of the screen. Their success was bolstered by the simultaneous release of multiple-set 78 rpm records featuring most of the twenty odd songs which were commonplace for the films of the time. Success on stage and with

[118] T S Mahadeo, 'With Alam Ara in the South: Triumphal Tour of First Talkie Party', *ITSJ*, pp.147-148.

gramophone records made huge stars of these performers.[119] Gramophone records of stage and general songs were hugely popular and had been anthologised in print through the 1920s.[120] One such song, *Chirage Chaplin*, was a tribute to the comedian's art set to *nai*, *ghazal* and *kavali* styles of singing.[121] There was a sign-up mania as studios raced to hire the most popular stars of the day and launch new finds. Royal Cinetone's *Arabian Nights urf Alif Laila* featured Mr Lalobhai, 'popular idol of the Bombay stage and HMV artiste'.[122] *Sita Swayamwar* (1933) featured Master Mohammed of 'Harishchandra fame' and 'Gramophone star'.[123] It is interesting that a Muslim actor – Master Mohammed – was advertised as a famous interpreter of one of the most popular Hindu mythological stage and cinema roles – Harishchandra – also, ironically, the subject of Phalke's first silent film made in 1913. A 1929 Imperial production of the same story had starred Fatma Begum and Khalil in the lead roles.[124]

Between 1931 and 1933, the world of the cinema was in flux: the old certainties of the silent era having been thrown off-gear by the new technology. Many stars of the silent era like Gulab and Nandram fell prey to the test of the talkies. Either their voices or their diction were found wanting by the standards required by the talkies. Very few of them could sing and playback singing was still a few years in the future. Other stars like Sulochana, Zubeida and Gohar had to undergo extensive training to make the leap into the new world of the talkies.[125] Thus respectable stardom was challenged, if only for a brief period, by novice stars of the theatre, and stage-singing and stage-dancing.

The stage dominated the early talkie scenario because of the large scale production of historical and semi-historical films. The Calcutta studios and Prabhat extensively used mythological-historical films, based on stage productions, with a large number of songs to help them tide over the transition to the talkies. As in the theatre, the appropriation of classical culture through historical films helped establish the bourgeois filmmaker's credentials as the arbiter of cultural taste in Indian society. However, as will be seen, the theatricality of bourgeois cinema was evaluated differently from that of the Parsi-stage based cinema. It was not until 1935 that these studios could confidently produce their first social films for an all-India audience. By that time, the craze for the talkies had stabilised. The average number of songs in films had come down to twelve and audiences were tiring of the endless song and dance extravaganzas thrown at them.[126]

Despite the fact that various film cultures had conflicting expectations of the talkies, the popularity of the songs bridged the gap between them. The legendary status of some of the early talkie songs was due to their universal popularity. WM Khan's *Dede khuda ke naam* in *Alam Ara* was a universal hit and many such nationwide hits followed, culminating in the popular soundtracks of *Devdas* and *Achhut Kanya*.[127] *Lal-e-Yaman*'s 'melodious music and sweetest songs' had become so popular 'that they are heard being sung and repeated at many street-corners in the

[119] Interview with Narendra Shrimali.
[120] For example, the multi-volume *Phonograph Gayanmala* published from Surat by Chunilal Maganlal for Kagji Mahmud and Mahmadbhai in the 1920s and 1930s.
[121] *Phonograph Gayanmala*, pts 1-18 (Surat, 1930), p.99.
[122] *TC*, June 1933, p.21.
[123] *TC*, Aug.1933, p.35.
[124] *BC*, 22 June, 1929.
[125] *TC*, July 1932, p.14.
[126] Interview with Narendra Shrimali.
[127] WM Khan, 'The First Song', *ITSJ*, p.24.

city'.[128] Songs provided the respectable studios with a bridge between the 'classes' and the 'masses' and set the scene for the formulation of the typical Bombay song and dance cinema. By 1933, a critic in Lahore could write that 'Nothing seems to attract the excited and belligerent crowds more easily than the first day showing of a new Talkie.'[129] Obviously, the belligerent crowds on the opening day of a talkie included both the 'classes' and the 'masses' and what brought them together was the music of the early talkies.

The Cultural Location of the Bourgeois Cinema

In a period when nationalism was being transformed into a mass-mobilisation movement, the press played a stellar role in mediating and conveying the national cultural consensus to the public. Newspapers and magazines were replete with discussions about the political and cultural changes affecting Indian society.[130] This section will discuss the discourse on history and realism that informed much of nationalist cultural debate. The nation being imagined had to be provided with respectable cultural credentials. The project of inventing a tradition for modern India needed mediation between history and realism: the question was to find values from the past that could fruitfully guide the project of national self-definition in the present.[131]

Anthony Smith has noted that early national cinemas in the 1920s and 1930s were characterised by a 'growing interest in archaeological verisimilitude, in dramatic reconstruction and in atmospheric evocation of myths, symbols, traditions and memories.'[132] An accurate knowledge of history was seen to confer edifying values that could shape the character of citizens of a nation in the making. VB Kirtikar wrote in the *Bombay Chronicle*, 'We are making history today. We are on trial to prove nationhood.'[133] As 'everything is haloed by passage of time', history had to be represented 'accurately' to be effective. Another critic wrote:

> The studios forget that historical subjects if properly attempted can do much educational work. History is generally taught in the classes devoid of interest. In cinemas, the historical subjects might be made colourful to capture imagination. Instead of that, if history is twisted into fiction, the result generally becomes horrible.[134]

In the same article he criticised the costumes worn in semi-historical films as displaying 'damnable ignorance', a problem compounded by characters behaving like 'unhistorical personages'. Bourgeois critics were already training their guns at the cosmopolitan *bazaar* cinema. But even in a discussion about the accuracy of filmic representations of history, the writer stressed the need to make historical subjects 'colourful' to capture spectatorial imagination. Even accurate historical images had to be 'invented'.

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[128] *BC*, 11 Nov., 1933.
[129] *TC*, Sept.1933, p.17.
[130] On the relationship between mass nationalism and bourgeois print culture, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991).
[131] On the notion of 'invention of tradition', see introduction to Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).
[132] Anthony Smith, 'Images of the Nation: Cinema, Art and National Identity' in Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (eds.), *Cinema and Nation* (London, 2000), p.48.
[133] 'National Reconstruction in Indian Cinema', *BC*, 3 Mar., 1934.
[134] Jatindranath Mitra, 'A Review of Indian Films', *FL*, Puja Issue, 1934 in Samik Bandhopadhyay (ed.), *Indian Cinema; Contemporary Perceptions From the Thirties* (Jamshedpur, 1993), p.32.

The bourgeoisie's use of realism as a political and cultural weapon to establish its credentials for leadership was bracketed by an emerging consensus about the essential core of Indian culture. Social reform realist narratives or stories of national uplift had to be presented in culturally specific contexts. The cultural 'work' of nationalism represented a historical conjuncture where two overlapping processes were at work simultaneously. On the one hand, the cultural project of nationalism grew by progressively encompassing ideas and institutions from existing public culture. Over time, it drew in cultural institutions, including cinema, that had hitherto been outside the sweep of its controlling gaze. On the other, in carrying out this project, the nationalist bourgeoisie sought to provide extant cultural practices a distinct symbolic shape that could serve as shorthand referents for the nation and its elite.

Critical to the bourgeois cinema was the creation of what Anthony Smith has called a national 'ethnoscape' for Indian culture. An ethnoscape, according to Smith, is the imaging of a territory that 'mirrors the ethnic community and is historicised by the communal events and processes whose relics and monuments dot its landscape so that land comes to belong to a people in a particular way – the ancestral homeland.'[135] Bourgeois filmmakers sought to control popular cinema's promiscuous cultural hybridity by separating a constructed vision of the essentialised cultural realities of Indian society from what they considered alien to the purity of Indian tradition. They sought to project an imaginary vision of Indian society sanctioned by ancient tradition as 'one nation within the four walls of the cinema hall'.[136] The discourse of bourgeois reform of cinema in the 1930s can be elucidated with reference to the trajectories of the development of realism in bourgeois art, literature and the theatre from the period of the Swadeshi movement in the first decade of the twentieth century.

One of the foremost influences on realist depictions of Indian history in Indian art was the trend of artistic naturalism ushered in by Ravi Varma's paintings and oleographs. This genre of art fused iconologies of traditional Indian painting with modern naturalism, and came to influence the theatre and ultimately cinema.[137] Tapati Guha-Thakurta describes elite discussions around the 'Indianness' of Varma's paintings in the early part of the twentieth century when 'ideas were raised and projected about how genuine 'Indianness' relied not merely on the content, but also on the form, spirit and emotion of a painting.'[138] For such critics, earlier Indian art, tied down to the realities of patronage and the market, had lacked a self-consciousness about being 'Indian'. A *Modern Review* article praised Ravi Varma for reconstructing the glorious past in paintings and sculpture for the moral uplift and elevation of thoughts and emotions in the nation-building project.[139] He was especially praised for inventing a national body-type – pan-Indian faces 'individualised', yet 'standing forth as ideal national prototypes.'[140] It goes without saying that the entire Ravi Varma canon exclusively depicted Hindu history and culture. In other words, he was one of the pioneer creators of the Hindu ethnoscape for modern India.

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[135] Smith (2000), p.54.
[136] Mohamed Sadiq Zia, 'The Trend of Thought', *VW*, 17 June, 1933, p.17.
[137] Phalke was intimately involved with the activities of the Ravi Varma press, the first mass marketeer of litho-prints of Indian mythological scenes. Dharap (1978), pp.50-51.
[138] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c.1850-1920* (Cambridge, 1992), p.110. See also Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922* (Cambridge, 1995).
[139] Guha-Thakurta (1992), p.186.
[140] Guha-Thakurta (1992), p.110.

Varma's contribution to both visual and performative worlds lay in providing dramatic and realist images for Hindu mythological stories, which in turn influenced the rising tide of historical realist theatre. According to Guha-Thakurta, as forms of figurative drawing became more realistic, 'the episodes from mythology were also located in more tangible and atmospheric settings of palaces and landscapes'.[141] In other words, they became more theatrical.

The 1920s and 1930s saw the rise of popular realist bourgeois literature in all major Indian languages, especially in Bengali and Hindi. Sarat Chandra became the most popular author amongst the middle classes and was one of the first authors to be extensively adapted to the Bengali stage and the Calcutta cinema.[142] He was appreciated for his 'deeper awareness of life, subtle psychological delineation of characters, presentation of changing social milieu and impact of individual characters' and his 'deep human sympathy' for women.[143]

The turn towards literary realism was backed by the project of defining the characters of realist fiction in classical and ideal terms. The literature of social reform had to offer heroic characters in larger-than-life sweeps of the realist brush. It was vital to this project to image the new national leadership through fictive characters, which invariably meant defining agency in terms of masculine values. Women were inevitably portrayed in dire terms, suffering in the shackles of patriarchy in some of the most purple melodramas possible. They were perpetually in need of rescue by men or had to undergo tremendous moral and physical tribulations before being redeemed by death or domestic happiness. Melodramatic realist fiction became the norm and calling-card of bourgeois social reform-oriented cultural activism. This was all the more true of the bourgeois stage. The developments on the Calcutta stage directly affected the early Calcutta bourgeois talkie. The stage provided the initial input of actors, singers, musicians and directors for companies like New Theatres. Important figures of the early talkie era such as Sisir Bhaduri, Premankur Atorthy, Tinkari Bandhopadhyay and KC Dey, to name only a few, were products of the Bengali stage as were directors like Madhu and Debaki Bose.

Beginning with the agitation against the Dramatic Performance Act, through the Swadeshi movement, the Non-Cooperation movement and the Civil Disobedience movement, the repeated 'renaissance' in stage activities was firmly rooted in political activism.[144] A survey of popular plays between 1911 and 1924 (when Sisir Bhaduri produced his famous *Seeta*), reveals that the 1910s and the 1920s were the time when representations of antagonism between Hindus and Muslims were worked out most elaborately on the Calcutta stage through the success of plays like *Rejia*, *Moghul Pathan*, *Nadir Shah*, *Ayoddhar Begum*, *Alamgir*, *Shahjahan* and *Panipath*.[145] The Swadeshi movement had created a substantial market for historical plays. The plays of DL Roy, for example, combined Shakespeare with ostensibly allegorical representations of Hindu opposition to Muslim monarchs to depict Hindu revivalism. The entry of the middle class on to the stage, an area considered disreputable at the time (for at various times the middle class has not felt so), had to be anointed through high cultural forms. Most traditional societies transit this way from traditionalism to a

[141] Guha-Thakurta (1992), p.100.
[142] On the popularity of Sarat Chandra's works in the 1920s and 1930s, see Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (Delhi, 1988).
[143] Mukherjee (1982), p.444.
[144] See Mukherjee (1982).
[145] Mukherjee (1982), p.128.

more modernised realist mode of cultural expression.[146] Historical plays were the dominant theatrical genre in the 1920s. However, the ethnoscapic sensibilities of Roy's historical plays, much lauded for their restrained realistic style, were soon to be transferred to the realist theatre.

The entry of the actor-director Sisir Bhaduri into the Calcutta theatre-world is seen by most historians of the theatre as a landmark. Production style took on a more realist mode, 'all contributing to achievement of one total effect and impression'. This involved a number of innovations. Actors stopped performing solo and dialogues were now delivered with appropriate pauses and emphasis and less gesticulation. Movement became 'balanced and significant' and the actors interacted more with each other during the performance. Scenes and costumes were 'less anachronistic'. Art Theatre Limited's performance of *Karanarjun* had used 'appropriate sets and scenes' with 'Ajanta style costumes and ornaments'.[147] Sisir Bhaduri's much-lauded style was kicked off by a reworking of the *Ramayana* in his play *Seeta*. The play boasted sets and costumes drawn from Indian art.[148] Songs were reduced, and were in the 'new poetic style'. The literary realism of the performance was enhanced by atmospheric music, replacing grand concert music. Theatrical innovators sought to forge a unified moral tenor to the play by doing away with the stark division between its tragic, comic and heroic parts. Sets were simplified to direct spectators' attention away from their 'grandeur' towards the performer's art.[149]

As in the world of art in the late nineteenth century, the entry of gentlemen artists into the world of the performing arts led to a homogenisation of styles, fusing the melodramatic rhetoric of popular plays with gentlemanly codes of restraint and 'realist' values.[150] This is apparent from Sisir Bhaduri's propensity to mix the romantic with the realistic and the description of his style of acting as 'dramatic but not theatrical'. His style was an elaborate balancing act between the registers of popular melodrama and the bourgeois prose-play. Although he used a melodic dialogue delivery, his recitation was restrained, but not to the extent that it would sound like prose. Above all, his manual gesticulations were restrained, which went a long way towards creating an illusion of realism.[151] Gesticulatory exaggeration was what separated the dramatic from the theatrical. A film critic found 'the manual movements' of the queen while delivering her dialogues in the film *Khuda Dost* (1933) 'unbearable'.[152]

The realist theatre of the 1920s was also notable in the way in which the role of women on stage was abbreviated and transformed. Gone were the dancing *sakhis* of Radha and the erotic lead heroine of the Parsi-style stage. Mukherjee alludes to the Bengali theatre falling under the influence of the Parsi stage in the 1910s and 1920s and hints at the theatre becoming overtly sexualised.[153] However, the performers of the 1920s and 1930s he lists includes very few women. Restrained melodrama implied restrained sexuality and in most cases deleted women altogether.

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[146] On similar techniques of legitimation used by an Asian bourgeoisie, see Jason Gibbs, 'Spoken Theater, La Scène Tonkinoise, and the First Vietnamese Songs', *Asian Music*, Fall/Winter, 1999/2000, pp.6-7.
[147] Mukherjee (1982), pp.152-158.
[148] Mukherjee (1982), pp.185-188.
[149] Mukherjee (1982), pp.152-158.
[150] Guha-Thakurta (1992), p.113.
[151] Mukherjee (1982), pp.474-475.
[152] *FL*, 18 Feb.,1933, p.17.
[153] Mukherjee (1982), p.523.

The discourse on acting was backed by an equally powerful discourse on the content of cinema. The coming of the talkies strengthened a strand of bourgeois social reform cinema that had been eclipsed in the late 1920s. The early talkie socials increasingly stressed the virtues of the bourgeois married woman of realist literature. Courtship too had to be defined within the parameters of marital values. A health expert confirmed that 'music and marriage enhance facial charms and maidenly attractiveness respectively.' This, according to him, was 'proven' by science.[154] So pervasive was the 'marriage problem' film that one critic reacted against the trend: 'The artist, even the scientific writer, must concentrate more upon the solution of the love problem than upon the marriage question if he wants to produce an organic whole.'[155]

Not surprisingly, some early talkie socials such as *Indira M.A.* and *Gunsundari* were remakes of the silent socials. To these were added films like *Chandidas*, *Devdas*, *Dr. Madhurika*, *Naya Zamana*, *Miss 1933* and countless social films that focussed more on the 'marriage question' than on sexual romance.[156] *Dr. Madhurika*, based on a screenplay by KM Munshi, was a clash between 'the legal mind of husband and science absorbed mind of wife'.[157] A review of the film went:

> With the spread of education, modern education in the proper Western acceptance of that phrase, the problem of the educated girl and the professional woman is spreading in this country, where home life and marriage are ruled by ancient tradition and cast iron rules regarding the place of the wife and the superiority of the husband. …The resulting conflict between the head and the heart, between children and careers, between home and society provides the rocky reef upon which we are liable to be wrecked unless a balanced sense of values brings truer perspective to the rescue.[158]

A 1934 review of the film industry announced the rise of a new kind of star. Grudgingly acknowledging that the older stars of the silent era like Sulochana and Gohar still dominated the star market, it enthusiastically highlighted the rise of the new stars, products of the new studio orders of Prabhat and New Theatres by remarking that, '1934 saw two players attaining full-fledged stardom with but one picture to their name – Shanta Apte and Umashashi.' Older stars such as Zubeida and Gulab were merely 'giving some convincing portrayals'.[159] Critics clearly sided with the new generation of actresses groomed by the studios to play dutiful Hindu women.

[154] Fakir Mohamed, 'Is Our Screenland an Ideal Galaxy', *VW*, 25 Feb., 1933, p.16.
[155] MK, 'The Love Theme in Indian Pictures', *BC*, 29 Jan., 1935.
[156] *BC*, 19 Oct., 1935.
[157] *BC*, 8 Jan., 1936.
[158] *TOI*, 11 Jan., 1936.
[159] Editorial, *Moving Picture Monthly*, Annual Issue, 1935, in Bandhopadhyay (1993), p.26.

Chapter Six

Creating A Cinema For Nation And Tradition

"'Cinema' is daily becoming a greater and greater factor in our national life", wrote a film critic in the September 1933 issue of *The Cinema*.[1] His wordplay on 'cinema' embodied the growing popularity of both magazine and medium. The discourse in the press was symptomatic of a shift in public attitudes towards cinema as an institution. This chapter will seek to analyse the discourses about the meanings of cinema in Indian society as reflected in journalistic, filmic and audience practices in the period of the transition from silent cinema to the talkies.

The project, discussed in the last chapter, of creating a Hindu ethnoscape as the *de facto* cultural exemplar for modern India was extended to cinema *via* what Darrell William Davis describes, in the context of inter-war Japanese cinema, as the 'monumental style' of filmmaking.[2] This is not to say that the Indian and Japanese industries presented similar films. But the imperatives of the Japanese and Indian elite were very similar, preoccupied as they were with inventing traditions for modernisation by modelling cultural practices around what they thought were essential national characteristics milked from historical experience. What was also similar was the transition from aristocratic and hierarchy-ridden societies into modern democratic states. In both cases, this involved controlling the moral texture of popular culture – of which cinema was an important element – that threatened to destabilise traditional meanings of representational practice.

It will be argued that the institution of cinema underwent a fundamental re-evaluation and restructuring with the advent of the talkies. As Davis puts it:

> Finally, the linguistic linearization of cinema arrived with the perfection of synchronised dialogue in the 1920s, which solidified the position of film industries on national and nationalist grid. The adaptation of high literature and drama, the narrative elegance of the Griffith code, absorption of spectator's attention in the 'invisible' continuity system – extended by alignment of film along national co-ordinates.[3]

Cinema was appropriated by elements of an upper class-upper caste bourgeoisie in an effort to harness it to the service of nationalism and social reform. However, popular cinema was found woefully inadequate for a bourgeoisie seeking to reform the nation through literary realism: a style central to the project of defining the essence of Indian culture through cultural products that could serve as exemplars of nationalism and reform. On the one hand, the critique of popular cinema reveals the hybrid forms of cultural representation that it employed. On the other, the critique provides a framework for describing the project of the new reformist bourgeois cinema that defined itself against stagy melodrama, the look of performers, anachronisms of décor and dress, Islamicate elements in films and the on-screen female sexuality of popular cinema.

Further, it will be argued that the discourse on reform of audience taste was anchored in the commercial realities of the film market. The reformers needed to fill cinema halls with audiences willing to accept their arbitration. The discourse on the

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[1] *TC*, Sept.1933, pp.38-39.
[2] Darrell William Davis, *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film* (New York, 1996).
[3] Davis (1996), p.23.

atmosphere of cinema halls and their increasing stratification on class lines reflected the economic logic of bourgeois social reform. Popular cinema was relegated to the bottom rung of the cinema hall hierarchy. By capturing the distribution networks and the first regulatory bodies within the Bombay industry, the bourgeoisie managed to create an informal self-regulatory organisation backed by powerful connections with emerging governments and the commercial elite. More importantly, it radically changed the industry's composition in favour of Hindu performers who, according to the followers of bourgeois cultural realism, could best act out the Hindu ethnoscape on the silver screen. The transformation of film culture in the 1930s provided the discursive framework within which much of Indian cinema would be discussed in the decades to come.

Cinema and Public Opinion in the 1930s: The Rise of Film Journalism

A new phase in Bombay cinema's engagement with 'public opinion' began with the dramatic introduction of talkie films. As the last chapter showed, large markets for film magazines of various kinds emerged in the 1930s. News about films featured in 'respectable' cultural magazines like the *Indian Review*, edited by GA Natesan in Madras.[4] *FilmIndia*, the most popular film journal for the next two decades, was launched in 1935. It was considered 'artistically got up and worth reading'.[5]

The start of respectable film journalism coincided with new trends in the film world. Close relations were struck up between industry and media, which facilitated the rise of film journalism as a profession for educated men. Features and interviews with the stars were published alongside critical reviews and essays.[6] Stars also wrote regularly in newspapers and magazines.[7] Baburao Patel, the editor of *FilmIndia*, was a producer and director of films.[8] Film critics and reporters thus mediated closer relations between the industry and its audiences. The new magazines were part of the redefinition of the Bombay cinema's 'public' image and are an important source of information about a new phase in its long journey to respectability.

Although it is clear from the ICC evidence that sections of the educated classes formed a substantial part of Bombay film culture in the 1920s, little of this following found public expression in the form of a significant critical apparatus. In contrast, the 1930s saw the beginnings of film reporting on a large scale. The growth of the market in film magazines in English and upper class-upper caste regional dialects (here this means Sanskritised or Persianised versions of regional languages) shows that there was an educated readership for film news, reflecting cinema's increasing importance in the lives of the leisured classes. The critics were themselves part of this audience and thus represented the views of their class, defined by access to and use of upper-class linguistic and cultural idioms. They were part of a general influx of the educated classes into the Indian cinema world in all its aspects – as spectators, financiers, producers, critics, directors, performers, and technicians. However, the views of critics differed considerably in different film cultures, and in these discrepancies lie divergent

[4] The issues from 1933 onwards carried a regular column, *The Film World*, for cinema news from all over the world. Natesan had, in 1901, published EB Havell's *Essays on Indian Art, Industry and Education* that enunciated many of the artistic ideals guiding the upper class-upper caste elite of the 1930s.
[5] 'Two Film Magazines Artistically Got Up and Worth Reading', *TOI*, 18 May, 1935.
[6] Interviews with Rampyari, Zubeida, Gohar, Mazhar Khan and John Cawas in *TC*, *FL* and *VW*.
[7] Articles by Nalini Turkhud, Sabita Devi, Sitara Devi, Mazhar Khan and Sulochana amongst others in the aforementioned magazines.
[8] He started his own company – Gandharva Movietone – in the 1930s.

responses to the strands of cinematic style informing the Bombay industry from the 1930s.

Despite their role as specialists, film reporters and film critics of the 1930s should be considered amateur spectators rather than members of a culturally prestigious critical apparatus. Richard Dyer remarks that though film criticism and commentaries emanate from the industry 'it is commonly held that they are to be placed on the side of the spectators.'[9] As mentioned earlier, *Varieties Weekly* was a mouthpiece for New Theatres. Critics were the section of the audience that was involved in popularising the medium. In a period when film journalism was being forged for the first time, their class affiliations counted for more than their critical understanding of cinema. The industry needed educated writers of a particular class. As the upper class-upper caste educated formed a limited circle of acquaintances in Indian cities, the chances were that critics, filmmakers, producers and performers belonged to similar educational and professional circuits. Critics were mainly publicists of particular film styles and, above all, augmentors of the volume of empirical information about cinema that served as a powerful instigator for increased public consumption. Almost all writers were amateurs and thus their views are a useful barometer of the opinions of the educated class. Their views were bluntly stated and sometimes reveal remarkable expressions of class bias.

The Bourgeois Critique of Cosmopolitan *Bazaar* Cinema: Narratives, Bodies and Sexualities

Disciplining Narratives

The clash of values in the discourse about cinema reflect a fundamental conflict between two paradigms of allegorical representation of modernising Indian culture. In the clash between allegories of social reform – through work and romance on the one hand and through culture on the other – lay differential readings of the social functions of cinema. Popular cinema fitted into the interstices of a hectic urban rhythm of time and work. It did not aim to show off realist artistry, nor was it escapist as bourgeois critics made it out to be. It simply occupied a particular value in the cultural hierarchy of the *bazaar* quite different from the value bourgeois critics and filmmakers sought to ascribe to it. Stunts and adventures were physical metaphors for the hectic activity at the stock exchange, the hustle-bustle of the *bazaar*, fast moving traffic or the very speed of exchange of words when haggling. They symbolised street-smart urbanity. In keeping with the hectic pace of the *bazaar* cinema, skills flowed from one end of the *bazaar* cultural spectrum to the other – from the *kotha* (the courtesan's quarters) through Parsi stage to cinema – using traditions of performance and modulating them to the requirements of the times. It also allowed Eurasian women, ambiguously named women like Gulab, Moti, Heera, Panna, Gohar[10] and even the first wave of bourgeois actresses in the 1920s to rub shoulders, trained as they all were in the *tawaif*'s art of seductive glamour and the mastery of Urdu.

Tom Gunning has argued that nineteenth-century melodrama split into two sub-genres – the social melodrama and the melodrama of sensation. The latter

[9] Dyer, (1998), p.163.

[10] Naming courtesans and actresses after flowers and precious stones seems to have been a widespread practice in the Islamic world. In Egypt, for example, eunuch retainers of the harem, adept in the arts of music and dance, were similarly named. Michael Pearce, *The Mamur Zapt and the Donkey-Vous* (London, 1991), p.76.

included such narrative genres as horror and adventure stories. Thus the stunt film was, Gunning argues, a derivative of the melodramatic genre in which the heightening of emotions through melodramatic affect was effected through purely physical sensations. By the twentieth century, these polarities had been narrowed to produce hybrid narratives that partook of both social melodrama and the thriller in varying degrees of affective value.[11] Bourgeois critics of popular cinema sought to suppress the melodrama of sensation in favour of the social melodrama that better served their larger task of projecting images of a bourgeoisie historically ordained to rule the nation. The imagery of leadership had to be rooted in the classical image of the statesman, marked by hieratic gravity. To be effective as populist leaders, the bourgeoisie had to construct a discourse about itself as responsible modern citizens and to lead by example. This was done by projecting a ritualised image of well-ordered Indian life based on idealised social roles – of the dutiful *pater familias*, the dutiful friend, idealist student and so on. The imaging of citizenship through visualising a ritualised version of Indian life was based on tradition – a concept linking the past to the present. Bourgeois cinema was characterised by lending historical hues to contemporary characters. The connecting link was the narrational technique of social realism that allowed well-rounded characters to be formulated: ciphers that could be modulated at will into either historical or social-realist characters.

Adventure fiction and films, by contrast, did not allow full-blown characterisation of their protagonists and therefore were not easily assimilable into the constructed traditions that emphasised historical idealism of character and action. Their characters were stereotypical and the action was too rapid to allow for psychological elaboration, their deeds impelled by tangible goals in the outside world rather than by inner psychological dilemmas. The stress on action and active pursuit of worldly interests was inimical to a tradition sought to be built on a spiritual base. This put the popular cinema totally outside the upper class-upper caste bourgeoisie's nationalist cultural strategies.

Not surprisingly, the early historical talkies were thinly-veiled family melodramas. *Chandidas*, *Raja Harishchandra* and *Puran Bhakt*, to name only a few, were as much about the duties of male citizens towards parents, preceptors, wives and children as they were about history. The films were constructed to bring out their subjects' unique personalities through techniques such as long takes, long dialogue situations, and continuous rather than episodic narration. Such innovations allowed for in-depth character development that, as in the case of historical and social realist fiction, permitted the two-way slippage between the past and present. One of the doyens of early bourgeois historical cinema, Bhalji Pendharkar, firmly believed that 'history repeats itself' and that 'people must learn' from history to guide their present lives.[12]

The cinematic mode of address chosen for such a 'historic' reconstruction of 'history' through cinema was the 'monumental style' of cinema – a cinematic vision of indigenous tradition that was based on the assumption that there was an 'intrinsically valuable heritage to be regarded with pride and awe'. In this cinema, period design, behaviour and ethics, 'as much as the characters and situations based

[11] Tom Gunning, 'The Horror of Opacity: The Melodrama of Sensation in the Plays of André de Lorde' in Bratton, Cook and Gledhill (1994), pp.50-52.
[12] Sanjit Narwekar, 'The Historical Approach', *Cinema in India*, May 1992, p.33.

upon them' were rendered 'objects of reverence and respect'. This style was characterised by 'epic scale, hieratic gravity, stately camera movement and long takes' and 'the aim was to sacralize the traditional forms and give them a strong pull towards the mythic, the nativist and the ultranationalistic.'[13]

The monumental style was a collage of techniques that mixed the classical continuity system with traditions of indigenous theatre. In the Indian case, this meant a strong stress on framing the body in tableauesque poses to lend iconic configuration to screen action at key moments in the narrative.[14] The fusion of styles made allegorical representations of the past 'real' in the present through evocation of 'traditional' gestures that, by virtue of being constructed as 'traditional', bridged the gap between past and present. Compared to this, in popular cinema, as in the Japanese case, the 'period setting [was] formulaic to the point of invisibility'.[15] Being action-based, popular cinema used traditional symbols as short-hand tropes to give a rough idea of the cultural landscape of the film. The allegory was lost in the welter of action and plot. Davis also notes that the monumental style that celebrated indigenous tradition 'for its own sake' served extra-cinematic purposes more readily than the more instrumental appropriations of tradition by popular films, where period setting, costume and gestures were used more or less synoptically.[16] The principal extra-cinematic purpose for the creation of the Indian monumental style was the creation of an edifying ethnoscape for social reform and national regeneration. The cultural atmospherics of historical cinema could easily be translated to narratives of social realism. Bourgeois leadership had to be constructed through good stories that cast them in the role of the bearers of the nation's tradition.

'Good stories' were precisely what popular cinema lacked. The lack of character development in *bazaar* narratives formally excluded them from appropriation into the national tradition. As in the case of the Arabian romance, the bourgeois viewer began to tire of the narrative after a while. Critics complained that popular films did not pay attention to 'inner conflict of play' nor were they woven around a 'single simple reality'.[17] Adventure films moved across varied landscapes and social situations following the fortunes of the hero and heroine, thereby undercutting character development that could ensue from the depiction of a 'single simple reality'. Most critics emphasised the need for careful 'plot selection'. Not only did they target the technical aspects of plot development, but since 'kings were not topical', the content of films needed to be adjusted to 'modern realities'.[18] Another critic, bringing together popular cinema's economic, cultural and technical insufficiencies, emphasised that since 'the story was most important', 'storywriters should be looked for or developed', a strategy which would be impossible since investment in cinema was 'only from point-of-view of profit just as in the cotton mills'.[19] These statements sum up bourgeois discomfort with popular cinema – bad narrational technique, archaic topics and story-telling techniques, and bad institutional practices such as employing storytellers adept at archaic as opposed to modern literary

[13] Davis (1996), p.41.
[14] Ravi Vasudevan, 'The Politics of Cultural Address in a 'Transitional Cinema': A Case Study of Indian Popular Cinema' in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (eds.), *Reinventing Film Studies* (London, 2000), pp.137-138.
[15] Davis (1996), p.41.
[16] Davis (1996), p.41.
[17] 'Cine-plays, Stories and Playwrights: is Imitation the Sole Ambition', *BC*, 27 Oct., 1934.
[18] 'Uncritical Appreciation of Indian Plays', *BC*, 18 Dec., 1935.
[19] *BC*, May 6, 1936.

techniques – all in all, a style of cinema lacking in well-rounded characters who could be appropriated in the name of history and tradition through the monumental style.

According to the critics, *bazaar* cinema did not have good stories because they were badly told. The main enemy of good cinema was its staginess. The criticism of the staginess of popular cinema revealed an utter disdain for films deriving from Parsi theatre or similar traditions that were characterised by what critics called an 'argumentative' form of dialogue delivery.[20] Elocutionary and declamatory, these performative styles were products of sophisticated traditions of voice training which helped project words from the stage into halls with a capacity of a thousand people without the help of microphones. A critic stated that while the actor in the theatre 'had to compact with the audience through voice and elocution', the film actor had to convey something over and above words and gestures – his expression.[21] Film actors were expected to let the expression of gestures and words interact with the naturalness of action and scenery as caught by the film camera. In theatre, voice and gesture had to be exaggerated as they were the sole vehicle of interacting with the audience. This was not so in cinema. The actor had to project acting and speech at a pitch that fitted the illusion of 'natural' action created by cutting techniques along fragments of dialogue and change of location of action.

Even within this critique of the 'theatricality' of cinema, there was space for stagy language and gestures if the 'verses were done realistically', according to 'a sense of proportion'.[22] For this, dialogues had to be carefully written with an emphasis on short and intelligible phrases. The script had to highlight the psychological dimension of the story as the main guideline for the film. Long and declamatory dialogues detracted from the flow of action by impeding the conveyance of information to the audience as well as by focusing the spectator's attention on the body of the actor rather than on the flow of action. In the new kind of cinema, action and words had to be allusive to fit the newer conventions of story-telling based on short and 'realist' dialogue and a rapid flow of action created by new editing techniques emerging from Hollywood and the new-fangled realist stage. Only this would align the story with 'the flow and purity of the dialogue and action'.[23] The psychological story became the most important element of the film. The aim was to favour a 'literary disposition whose reading practices interiorise the reader/viewer's relationship to the text' against an orality that 'sustains an externalised, declamatory and musical form'.[24] Thus theatricality was admissible but had to be reformed according to literary-realist conventions.

As will be seen, the critique of popular cinema's 'staginess' was aimed at a particular form of 'stagy' entertainment – that of the Islamicate cinema that drew inspiration from the Parsi stage. Early bourgeois talkies were themselves extremely stagy, but this staginess fitted well with the Hindu ethnoscapic vision. As seen in the discussion about Sisir Bhaduri's acting, bourgeois realism was an attenuated version of stage melodrama. The acting style remained extremely stagy, depending on tableauesque poses, especially in song sequences. A comparison of two early talkies like *Chandidas* (considered realist) and *Lal-e-Yaman* (considered stagy) reveals no great difference in acting style. The main difference is that while the former has less

[20] *FL*, 1 July, 1933, p.15.
[21] 'The Way to Stardom', *VW*, 28 Jan., 1933, p.5.
[22] *FL*, 28 Jan., 1933, p,17.
[23] *FL*, 25 June, 1932, p.6.
[24] Ravi Vasudevan, *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema* (Delhi, 2000), p.9.

characters and locales, allowing for characterisation of lead roles as ideal husband, king, wife or son, the latter moves through multiple situations with unusual rapidity. *Lal-e-Yaman* might be low on characterisation of ideal familial prototypes, but it is definitely not more stagy than *Chandidas*. Yet, as will be seen, the former was considered the acme of screen realism and the latter 'welcome entertainment'.

Thus realist acting, however stagy, fixed the spectator's attention on the lead player's action that stressed the individuality of the performer's art. As Richard Dyer points out, the rise of social-realist cinema was linked to 'bourgeois' consciousness because it posited 'a model of history and social process in which explanation is rooted in the individual conscience and capacity rather than in collective and/or structural aspects of social life.'[25] This meant that the performer increasingly came to be seen as an artist, actively creating socially meaningful roles through acting skills.[26] The very mundaneness of the plot stressed the actor-artist's creativity since, unlike the mythological or stunt hero or heroine, the realist performer had no help from various *deus ex machina*.[27]

This is what Edgar Morin describes as the 'embourgeoisement' of cinema through the search for 'social themes' at the expense of stereotypical action.[28] He notes that with the advent of the talkies, there was an intensification of the bourgeois quest for respectability through what he calls the 'increasingly typical warp of behaviour' of social-realist cinema.[29] A realist film like *Devdas* was praised for depicting 'the daily tragedies and tedium of any Indian'. It was 'coherent, compact and quick moving' with 'not one incident, not a bit of dialogue, not a movement' wasted.[30] There was 'no pandering to the baser instincts with dances and display that have hitherto been regarded as indispensable requisites from the box office point of view.' It had a 'lofty moral, even philosophical tone'.[31] *Devdas* symbolised a compact and restrained code of realist filmmaking. In the 'lofty moral, even philosophical tone' of the film lay the monumental style of neo-traditional cinema. The aim was to bring the affective value of the gestural components of cinematic performance in line with those of neo-traditional bourgeois literary fiction. The adaptations of Sarat Chandra's novels (*Devdas* being one of them) in the 1930s were themselves a sign of this project. 'Miraculous escapes', 'quick and easy victories' and a 'happy close' of the popular film were inimical to a cinema that needed 'consistent and convincing development of plot' through 'true to life' stories and 'convincing development of character'.[32]

The obsession with the 'flow and purity' of dialogue found expression in the critics' regular complaint about how song, dialogue and action interacted in the stagy films. The *Filmland* New Year issue of 1933 criticised Prabhat's *Shyam Sunder* for inserting songs in 'unhappy situations' which detracted from the 'seriousness' of the affair.[33] Nor was a king allowed to sing 'before his courtiers' like an ordinary

[25] Dyer (1998), p.96.
[26] See Elizabeth Burns, *Theatricality* (London, 1972) quoted in Dyer (1998), p.91.
[27] On the function of mundaneness in social-realist films, see Dyer (1998), pp.21-23.
[28] Edgar Morin, *New Trends in the Study of Mass Communications* (Birmingham, 1969) quoted in Dyer (1998), pp.21-23.
[29] Morin quoted in Dyer, (1998), pp.21-23.
[30] *TOI*, 19 Oct., 1935.
[31] *TOI*, 5 Oct., 1935.
[32] VM Inamdar, 'What leads to Mediocre Film Production', *BC*, 5 Aug., 1936.
[33] *FL*, New Year Issue, 1933, p.10.

plebeian.[34] Songs, like verses, done 'realistically' had to be placed *vis-à-vis* the action and dialogue so as not to impede the emotional tenor of the story. For the critics, songs at inopportune moments spoilt the narration of the story by distracting the spectator from the action and the psychological intricacies of the plot. Thus the suppression of melodrama was more a matter of controlling a certain type of melodrama. As mentioned earlier, romance-adventure films sold themselves as socials as well, and in Gunning's scheme, the melodrama of sensations was only a few degrees away from social melodrama.

Disciplining Bodies

Ultimately, good stories and the removal of melodrama depended upon changes in the moral texture of imagery and central to this imagery was the star body. The film critics of the day invented a discourse on ideal physical prototypes for the new breed of actors and actresses who would symbolise a new cinematic order. In the new cinema, the ideal body would stand for the good health of Indian society and its citizens. Physical prototypes associated with virtue and courage would reveal the inner strength of Indian culture and tradition. In this logic, the body became an important adjunct to other elements such as scenery, dialogue or music to narrate a story. The body and its decorations revealed moral values that issued from the narration of the story. It would be costumed and decorated with suitable ornaments. The body would also be carried in a particular way. Many reviews made a special point of praising Durga Khote's gait.[35] A review of *Joydev* (1933) found the features of actors in the film 'repulsive' with too many 'flat nosed and flat chested girls'.[36] The actress was criticised for 'too much coquetry' accentuated by such sartorial graces as her 'V-shaped blouse'. Another review of the same film lamented the presence of a '*baijee* type' heroine and a hero who sported a '*Kabuli* cut' hairstyle.[37] In this vision, hairstyles and moustaches stood for moral values.

While a wide variety of physical characteristics could demonstrate virtue and character, there was more consensus on the body types to be excluded. 'Villagers dressed up as babus who looked like inhabitants of some village in the Malay straits or Rhodesia' were inadmissible.[38] Fat performers were taboo. The heroine of *Kapal Kundala* was 'too bulky' as was the hero of *Rup Basant*.[39] Heroes sporting modern hairstyles while playing non-modern characters were inadmissible. The actress playing Rami in a version of *Chandidas* was considered to be of the 'vamp type' and therefore unsuitable to play the lover of one of the most famous lyric-poets of medieval Bengal.[40] In contrast, Sulochana was praised for her 'Greek physique', her 'sternomastoid, trapezius and gastrocnemius' like 'Olympic champions'.[41] As a critic put it, the need was for actresses with 'slim and supple figures'.[42] In the same vein Gohar was praised for her 'movement of mathematical precision'.[43]

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[34] *FL*, 15 July, 1933, p.6.
[35] See for example, *TC*, Aug. 1933, p.55.
[36] *VW*, 1 July, 1933, p.10.
[37] *FL*, 1 July, 1933, p.15.
[38] *VW*, 11 Feb., 1932, p.21.
[39] *FL*, 23-27 May, 1933, pp.29-32.
[40] *VW*, 20 Apr., 1932, p.17.
[41] F Mohamed, 'Siren Sulochana', *VW*, 6 May, 1933, pp. 5-6.
[42] VP Sathe, 'Indian Films are Random', *BC*, 17 June, 1936.
[43] VS Nigam, 'Gohar, Our Versatile Star', *FL*, 10 Dec., 1932, pp. 5-7.

The search for a new corporeal regime was made more urgent by the cinema's reversion to the world of the stage with the advent of the talkies. This time, the threat was even more potent because of the mass popularity of the singing and dancing stars. The critique of the screen image was a critique of the class of performers as well. Nalini Turkhud, daughter of a judge and exemplar of the new class of heroines entering the cinema, commented that film actors 'must act well' and 'look well' in addition to singing well. According to her, most actors in India 'were unfit to stand in before lens' since they lacked 'sharp features' nor did they 'look healthy'. They had 'expressionless faces' and 'ugly noses' with eyes 'not brilliant' that stared vacantly into the camera. When singers opened their mouths, they revealed *paan*-stained black teeth. Their exaggerated gestures while acting displayed 'bad taste' and 'vanity in showing off'. According to her, if such films were shown in the West, people would think that 'Indians were ugly'. She advised the studios to employ 'good looking actors' and 'train them well', crowning her argument by saying 'good birth alone counts in the choices of actors and singers'.[44] Significantly enough, in another article a few weeks earlier, she had identified the 'brave tradition of sheer nonsense' in films like *Indrasabha* and *Shirin Farhad* – classics of the Parsi-Urdu theatre and the cosmopolitan cinema – as the bane of Indian cinema.[45] The convergence in the opinions of an upper-class actress like Nalini Turkhud and the Calcutta critics about the theatrical cinema of the Parsi-Urdu variety defined the parameters of the proposed corporeal reform of the cinema.

One of the important presumptions of the critics regarding good cinema was the convergence they required between physical features, acting style of performers and the moral qualities ascribed to a role in the narrative. This was heightened in the talkies where the personality projected by words and action had to find a counterpart in the corporeal regime. The early history of the talkies can be imaged as a graveyard of many stars of the silent era whose bodies and voices did not match in ways that met the aesthetic requirements of the new realism. For example, if the filmic king commanded the respect of his subjects, it was in no small measure due to his ideal personality created through word, posture and gesture that attracted and commanded the submission of his subjects. *Puran Bhakt*, a film based on the life of a medieval king-devotee of Punjab, was praised for its depiction of 'mental self-control in front of love', 'obedience to the guru' and 'lofty dignity'.[46] The last two phrases bring out the functions of the ideal royal look – obedience and lofty dignity capable of commanding obedience from inferiors. The aura of Puran's dignified screen presence is comparable with the ideal prototype of the new hero set forth by another critic:

> The need of the hour is a man. He should not be too rough nor too mild. He need not be handsome, but should have a forceful personality. He should be able to get the woman to get what he likes. He should be a good companion, first class helper and a born commander. A woman should be able to depend on him for his good faith and manliness. She should fall in love with him unconscious that she is bestowing love on him.[47]

Like the king, the new hero had to be an amalgam of gentle and domineering tendencies. Cross-referencing between history and the present *via* the creation of personality stereotypes allowed the audience to see the present in historical films and

[44] *BC*, 22 Jan., 1936.
[45] BC, 4 Dec., 1935.
[46] F Mohamed, 'Movies and Moral Preaching', *VW*, 21 Oct., 1933, p.9.
[47] Sukumar Mitra, 'Our Stars', *FL*, 2 July, 1933.

the past in the social-realist cinema, a trend entirely understandable where the whole cinematic apparatus was geared towards the production of images of ideal leaders. This was quite apparent from the critic's reaction to *Puran Bhakt*,

> In worship of Rishis in forest, in Saigal's songs, unconquerable religious meditation of Guru, heaven loving countenance of *Kumar* and in the exulting expression ringing out of throat when he utters – God is Love one is brought in the presence and fragrance of Swami Vivekananda.[48]

Vivekananda's image, circulating after his death through lithographic prints, exerted a strong influence on the emerging aesthetics of the early talkies.[49] It is possible that the critic's response was due to the fact that Puran was garbed in ascetic robes after the style of the monks of Vivekananda's Ramakrishna Mission. Puran, a king of Punjab in the hoary past was thus aligned, by virtue of his princely looks, ascetic garb and deeds, with the modern saint-leader of twentieth-century Bengal and, by extension, the fantasised image of the modern leader for the present/future. A chain of associations was sought to be established between the ideal past, the immediate past and the present to legitimise nationalist-reformist moral values.

If the cinema of the early 1930s borrowed from literary and theatrical culture as well as from the imagery of popular prints of the day, there was also an interest in making looks comply with general standards of good health and physical vigour. Fakir Mohamed, director of the Valentino Club in Mysore wrote regularly to magazines exhorting better physical training for performers. He wanted a disciplined approach to dancing based on 'scientific discourse of physical culture' through a 'study of anatomy'.[50] In another article he spelt out the needs of the ideal star image – actresses had to have 'clean teeth bred on a diet of fruits', physical culture to 'transform a maid into a real Venus' and training in dance and music. For him, a 'common dancer personality spoilt the allure'.[51] A speaking body in a heroic role had to be robust and strong. JN Mazumdar in the article 'That You Must Mind', also recommended that actresses' gait and health be improved through exercise.[52]

Good physique stood for good character and was considered capable of carrying the burden of tales of virtue and valour. In some cases this appreciation swerved towards ethnic specifics, as when Himansu Rai recommended the good looks of the Punjabis as an asset to the industry. He said, 'The Punjab probably has a greater number of handsome men and women than most other parts of India.'[53] The ICC chapter of the Lahore proceedings reported that 'a high American authority in Bombay who knows about cinema' felt that 'it is the Punjab which can be looked to for supplying the best material so far as what is described as the screen value of the human face goes.' He had been all over India and was convinced from his experience that the Punjabis had the best physical features.[54]

In the wider social context, the increasing standardisation of sartorial and physiognomic regimes amongst the young – due to the introduction of uniforms in schools and colleges and the homogenisation of the work ethic in government and

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[48] F Mohamed, 'Movies and Moral Preaching', *VW*, 21 Oct., 1933, p.9.
[49] See Christopher Pinney, "The Nation (Un) Pictured?: Chromolithography and 'Popular' Politics in India, 1878-1995", *Critical Inquiry*, v.23, no.4, Summer 1997.
[50] F Mohamad, 'When Dances Leapt to Fame', *VW*, 18 Mar., 1933, pp. 5-8.
[51] F Mohamed, 'Is Our Screenland an Ideal Galaxy', *VW*, 25 Feb., 1933, pp. 15-16.
[52] *VW*, 21 Jan., 1933, p.14.
[53] *BC*, 24 Feb., 1934.
[54] *ICCE*, v. II, p.13.

public services – contributed substantially to the codification of a new corporeal regime. Unless backed by religious sanction, shaving off one's beard was a prerequisite for a government job.[55] Youthful looks were standardised through iconographic practice that included advertisements, Hollywood films, fashion columns in newspapers and the sheer force of emulation.

Disciplining Sexualities

Disciplining bodies was part of a larger bourgeois project to control the sexual tone of the ethnoscapic representational regime. Only then could the 'epic scale' and 'hieratic gravity' of the monumental style underlying the visualisation of the ethnoscape be harnessed to the service of social reform. Indeed, the construction of tradition presumed the innate goodness of women as the repositories of the best values of Indian culture. Rehana Tyabji, a musician and musicologist of the 1930s, commenting on the reform of Indian music through the increasing influx of middle-class women into the profession said:

> Our women have sometimes been blamed for their conservative instinct; but it is because of that they have clung more to, and been able to preserve better, the atmosphere and traditions of the old culture. They are therefore better fitted to be restorers of that culture.[56]

For Tyabji and most of her class, women were *a priori* superior to men in matters of tradition. They were ready-configured icons of ideal behaviour who could be used in narratives of social reform.

The preponderance of singing and dancing films in the Bombay industry was because of the demand from North India, especially from Punjab. At a meeting of the Motion Picture Society of India, Jayant Desai of Ranjit singled out the 'demand of songs in pictures specially from Punjab province (10 to 25)' as very harmful for the industry. Moreover, song and dance lowered the moral tone of films. Desai, representative of the 'respectable' Ranjit studios, proposed eight- to ten-reel films shown with a two-reel comedy as a remedy for overlong immoral films.[57] The criticism of average song-and-dance-based cinema picked out its purely performative aspects, especially dance, for reform. Dance, even more than music, was the principal stumbling block between the realist and the frivolous. Songs were admissible if they were well integrated into the narrative. They could be used to promote the classical musical traditions of India, as at Prabhat where classically trained music directors and performers like Keshavrao Bhole were used in its early talkies. But dance was completely antithetical to the tenor of the narratives then being promoted by the bourgeoisie. It became the single most important element sought to be reformed by upper class-upper caste elite filmmakers and critics.

For the bourgeois critic, the use of female dancing as a vital selling point of the early talkies was the surest sign of the popular cinema's frivolity. Since dances and a more generous use of on-screen feminine eroticism went together, the eroticism of dance was used as an extended metaphor to cover an entire range of unacceptable feminine erotic gestures including mouth-to-mouth kisses. As will be seen, over a period, dance was rhetorically constructed as the pernicious influence of blatant commercialism exploiting the baser instincts of the masses through popular culture.

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[55] GV Desani, 'The Merchant of Kishingarh', *Hali* (New Delhi, 1998), p.120.
[56] Rehana Tyabji, 'Music or Brahma-Nada' in Evelyn Gedge and Mithan Choksi (eds.), *Women in Modern India* (Bombay, 1929), p.122.
[57] *BC*, 18 Aug., 1934.

By 1935, one critic declared that "barring dance sequels, Indian films possess no such 'Evil'". The 'Evil' being disavowed was on-screen violence and sexuality targeted by social activism in America since the very inception of motion pictures.[58] The critique of on-screen dance was used to construct contemporary female performers in popular cinema as mere dancers, not worthy of being considered as artistic 'actresses'.

As seen from the section on disciplining bodies, the principal figure singled out for criticism was the courtesan-actress. In 1935, when a controversy broke out about the participation of two Parsi girls in the Bombay Talkies production of *Jawani ki Hawa*, the main objection raised against their participation in films was that the 'class of people on stage were objectionable'.[59]

The dual critique of the *baijee*-actress and 'dance' in the name of realism and propriety meant that any actress who danced on screen would now be evaluated against the courtesan-actress' art. What began as a critique of Madan's courtesan-actresses was over time extended to dancing actresses *tout court*. The courtesan-actress was not the only one to dance on screen; other actresses did as well. Thus, Zubeida, a top ranking star in Bombay, reminded a critic of 'Madan's Tara, the dancer', immediately evoking the image of a morally ambiguous courtesan.[60] The courtesan-actress' performance style thus became a moral framework against which all on-screen feminine sexuality was judged. The moral criticism of dance was also meant as a rebuke to companies and actresses who persisted in projecting a 'common dancer personality'. Attaching the opprobrium of the courtesan's reputation to a profession that was to emulate respectable realist literature and theatre was intended to shame the industry into more restrained codes of performance. The attack against the dancer-actress was an attack on *bazaar* cinema, an attitude reflected in the colloquial characterisation of the courtesan as a *bazaaru aurat* (woman of the *bazaar*). As a critic put it, 'We want actors, not songsters and unmeaning mimics.'[61] Performance by singing and dancing stars was not 'acting' in the bourgeois critic's eye.

This view of dance as the only 'evil' of Indian cinema has to be seen in the perspective of bourgeois views on cinema's function as an educator of the masses and a medium for serious, socially useful entertainment. According to a critic who saw no room for serious philosophical films in the market, the way out was to make films with 'acute touching tragic plots or social deformities'.[62] The implication was that if didacticism did not go down well with the audiences, seriousness could be maintained through realist tragedy and melodrama. The vulgarity of dance was not suited to the purposes of social reform and was therefore inauthentic. PN Ganguly, proprietor of Kali Films, Calcutta, criticised the Bombay film companies for not taking adequate advantage of natural facilities and outdoor scenes. In contrast, in Bengal, where 'the cinema-going public [was] intensely critical', a film had to have a 'true to life plot'. Thus Bengali cinema was moving away from mythologicals towards 'social dramas'. Films, according to Ganguly, should be shorter than approximately two hours, without frivolous elements and with more focus on human drama.[63] Realism, shorter films and lack of song and dance were the *mantra* of the new generation of film personnel.

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[58] Editorial, *Moving Picture Monthly*, Annual Issue, 1935 in Bandhopadhyay (1993), p.28.
[59] *BC*, 13 Sept., 1935.
[60] *FL*, New Year, 1933, p.49.
[61] *BC*, 18 Dec., 1935.
[62] *FL*, 13 May, 1933, p.19.
[63] *TOI*, 1 June, 1935.

However, the reform of on-screen female sexuality was problematised by the fact that romance remained the films' selling point. The bourgeois solution to the dilemma was to control the performative verve of on-screen feminine sexuality. For some critics, it had to be *shastric* – in line with the scriptures. The allegorical nature of the new narratives added an ideational level that was largely absent in the films that preceded the talkie age. Not that sexuality was ever defined outside the realm of monogamous relationships in the silent era, but there was a freer depiction of sexuality even in the idealistic narratives of the social romances which celebrated newly-invented modes of courtship in Indian society. In the 1930s, a critic defining the acceptable parameters of on-screen sex-appeal warned against a "wrong conception of 'it'", against its 'vulgar possibilities'.[64] Sex-appeal, according to the critic, 'should be part of personal magnetism and not sex magnetism'.[65] Another critic, underlining the need for proper training for actresses, referred to sex-appeal as residing in 'eye appeal', recapitulating bourgeois anxiety about the female gaze and crowd behaviour. As an antidote to excessive sex-appeal, the critic proposed the cultivation of 'a lack of self-consciousness' amongst actresses[66] to curb an excessively direct identification with the audience. Any excess was taboo. As in the case of melodrama, the bourgeois critique of screen sexuality was a matter of controlling degrees of performative affect.

Critics felt that amorous parts had to be done with restraint since the aim of social films was to reform society through language and gesture. A critic praised the 'love scene where Kapal sings her love for Nabakumar in his embrace' as sublime and in tune with '*shastric* love'. He considered the scene 'too pure to be sullied by lower passion, too grand to be misinterpreted, too sublime to be misunderstood.'[67] Melodramatic love backed by classical music and song was the antidote to overt female sexuality on-screen. Courtship was depicted in classical ways, with the hero and heroine averting gazes or touching and embraces restricted to playful and tragic or tense situations.

Zubeida was slammed for 'wearing up-to-date sandals and *saree*s' and for clinging 'too close' to Krishna in *Mahabharata* (1933). She needed 'lessons in modesty'.[68] The stress on *shastric* love aimed to bring romance closer to sexual norms of bourgeois monogamous companionate marriage. Women had to behave like ideal wives. The coquetry of the 'artless virgin' of the earlier cosmopolitan cinema was a threat to such norms and jarred with the recently constructed religiosity of a text like the *Mahabharata*.

The invention of a new corporeal regime for women on the screen to project images of domesticity and restrained femininity was bolstered by the elaboration of the second studio strategy of creating stars described by deCordova – that of conjoining the on-screen star persona with the public face of the actress. The star was to be projected as domestic yet modern. She had to emulate the screen role of Gohar in *Miss 1933* where Gohar 'discards the orthodox idea of slavery in matrimonial life, yet insists on independence and dignity as the equal partner of her husband without

[64] 'It' refers to the title of the 1927 Clarence Badger film starring Clara Bow and Antonio Moreno that popularised Clara Bow as the 'It Girl' and fashioned 'it' as an enduring popular culture term for sex-appeal.
[65] B Neppolan, 'Who Has 'It'?', *VW*, 17 Feb., 1934, pp. 6-8.
[66] S Rangaswami, 'Screen Star and Sex Appeal', *VW*, 10 June, 1933, p.7.
[67] Sanat Chatterjee, 'Kapal Kundala – an Emblem of Creative Art', *VW*, 10 June, 1933, pp.10-11.
[68] *VW*, 1 July, 1933, p.10.

claiming unrestrained license associated with freedom of western women'.[69] Interviews with heroines, published regularly in the magazines, offered intimate accounts of their private lifestyles. For example, Sabita Devi, a rising star of the 1930s, got up, fed birds, hurried to work and 'r[a]n back to mummy after work'.[70] Similarly, Kajjan was described as 'amazingly touching in her simplicity and innocence'. The writer was impressed by her 'shyness, receptiveness and confidence'.[71] The article was titled 'My Impression of Miss Kajjan', the 'my impression' reducing the distance between star and reader. These ploys humanised the stars while maintaining a tension between their persona as ordinary middle-class women and exotic beings. Sulochana was described as having a 'sweet voice on the phone as well'.[72] The star's 'sweet voice', now directly accessible to the reporter – the representative of the people – on the phone made her modern, ordinary and exotic at the same time. The drive towards domesticating the female star reached an apotheosis when magazines started publishing pieces depicting mock marriages of stars, thus plugging an image of stars as ordinary householders.[73]

These strategies sought to create the myth of the female star as the embodiment of bourgeois values of romance and monogamy. They facilitated the absorption of the star into the public imagination as ordinary-yet-extraordinary beings. The new star was a public icon and therefore had to be projected as respectable – on- and off-screen. Unlike the attempted reform of the cinema in the 1920s, there had to be a congruence between the public and private faces of the female star. A respectable bourgeois star, now deemed an artist, could not dance on the screen. Professionalisation of the arts under the aegis of cultural nationalism meant that film stars now had to project the image of being ideal citizens of a nation whose culture was defined by high-literary bourgeois values based on the literature of virtuous women by Sarat Chatterjee and KM Munshi.

The social context of the 1930s made the sexual reform of cinema inevitable. Women increasingly entered the public gaze as workers, consumers, teachers, nurses, writers, students, political activists and social workers.[74] The nationalist movement progressively appropriated the cause of women as a defining feature of its idealism. Caste and political organisations instituted women's activist wings. However, the entry of women into the public sphere had to be modulated by striking a balance between modernisation and neo-traditionalism, most notably in the area of marriage. Uniting the split register of female public presence – the modern and the neo-traditional – was the notion of 'duty' towards family, society and nation. Realist literature was firmly linked to the ethos of social reform and thus rooted in images of social propriety. The education system and the norms of middle-class upbringing, not least amongst which was reading morally edifying realist literature, instilled a romantic self-image of womanhood amongst educated women.[75] The romantic impulse, however, had to be tempered by restraint and social decorum. The aim was

[69] *BC*, 22 July, 1933.
[70] *TC*, June 1933.
[71] Nazir Ahmed, 'My Impression of Miss Kajjan', *TC*, Nov.1933, pp.22-23.
[72] BR Oberai, 'Interview with Sulochana', *TC*, June-July, 1933, p.16.
[73] D Silotria, 'Let Us Arrange a Marriage', *VW*, 27 May, 1933. Also, *FL*, 18 Feb., 1933.
[74] On the creation of a public culture of women in the 1930s, see Sudeshna Roy, 'Spirituality and Nationalist Domesticity: Rereading the Relationship', *The Calcutta Journal*, v. 19-20, 1997-1998.
[75] For the growth of a reading public amongst middle-class women, see Francesca Orsini, 'Domesticity and Beyond: Hindi Women's Journals in the Early Twentieth Century', *South Asia Research*, v.19, no.1, 1999.

to project a 'clean' image of monogamous companionate marriage, devoid of external signs of eroticism or active female sexuality.

Public representations of female sexuality were thoroughly revised due to the enormous influx of women into the public gaze and, in this period, into the cinema halls. Women's preferences were canalised into less sexualised forms of entertainment. By preferring *shastric* entertainment, women performed the socially ideal role that demanded of them to demonstrate chaste cultural tastes when given the freedom to choose. Arati Devi, writing in *Filmland*, defended the romantic film and critiqued the 'snobbery against romance'. She praised the romantic film for 'bringing in romance, especially for women'. She also added, a trifle defensively, 'women can discern between Passion and Love' thus defending women's predilections for romance as morally above suspicion.[76] The underlying message was that, given a choice, women would themselves eschew passionate films and choose only romantic ones.

The control of feminine cultural tastes was vital at a time when middle-class women were entering the world of public performance in large numbers. Most notably, cultural reformers like Rukmini Arundale were de-eroticisng Indian dances to re-invent them as 'classical' dances worthy of being taught to middle-class girls. By the 1920s, the efforts of art reformers like VN Bhatkande and VD Paluskar, in alliance with middle-class performers, had sought to textualise Indian musical traditions and separate music from dance.[77] Both Pushpa Sundar and Vidya Rao note that this process of textualisation was at the expense of 'light classical' musical forms like the *thumri* and the *kajri*, precisely the forms connected to the *tawaif*.[78] Bhatkande blamed the illiterate Muslim singers and their ignorance of Sanskritic traditions for the lewdness of light classical musical forms. Indeed, he refused to meet the *tawaif*s who 'would not help in the systematization of music, his primary aim in life.'[79]

Nita Kumar also notes a similar marginalisation of the *kajri* from the repertoire of classical performers in Banaras.[80] Her description of the city's popular culture makes the ubiquitous public presence of the *tawaif* in north Indian towns very clear. Until the 1920s, she was an essential component of religious fairs. Going by Kumar's description of this culture, the numbers of courtesans performing publicly for ordinary people seems to have been very large indeed.[81] However, an amateur music historian like Maharaj Prodyot Kumar Tagore felt the wanton entertainment taught by the Lucknow *ustaads* (music masters) induced 'many young men and women to walk in wrong and vicious paths'. It induced 'gross vandalism' through 'voluntary corruption' by 'teaching them all sorts of indecent songs'.[82] By the 1930s the reform of Indian dance and song was in full swing. For Kumar, the demise of the courtesan's public art at the *Burhva Mangal* fair was, 'in the language of reform

[76] *FL*, 4 June, 1932, p.5.
[77] See Pushpa Sundar, *Patrons and Philistines: Arts and the State in British India, 1773-1947* (Delhi, 1996).
[78] Vidya Rao, 'Thumri and Thumri Singers: Changes in Style and Lifestyle' in I Banga and Jaidev (eds.), *Cultural Reorientation in Modern India* (Simla, 1996), p.301.
[79] Prabhakar Chinchore, 'Pandit Bhatkande's Thoughts on Thumri' in RC Mehta (ed.), *Thumri Tradition and Trends* (Baroda, 1990), p.22.
[80] Kumar (1988), p.149.
[81] Kumar (1988), pp.127-129.
[82] Tagore (1926), p.73.

today, the signpost of a feudal age, and the disappearance of the sign accompanied the demise of the age itself.'[83]

It was in this context of the elite retreat from the popular rurban performance traditions of north India that Sitara Devi, formerly a performer at the court of the Rampur Nawab and then a cinema actress, wrote an article in the *Bombay Chronicle* about the need to codify the *mudras* of Indian dance to cut out its 'wilder movements'.[84] She made explicit references to musical notation and the importance of textuality for training artists on a larger scale. It is not surprising that in a period when more and more middle-class children were learning music and dance, textuality as a marker of codified respectability became *de rigeur* for bourgeois cultural production.

Ultimately the problem with popular cosmopolitan cinema's sexuality amounted to a competition between two contradictory models of the modernisation of Indian culture. On the one hand, elements of screen eroticism like mouth-to-mouth kissing or certain forms of dancing represented a loss of values due to perceived 'Westernisation', contrary to the tenets of '*shastric* love'. Zubeida's dance in Sagar's *Zarina*, an adaptation of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, triggered off a substantial public debate. Set amongst the gypsies of the north-west (closer to the exotic Orient than mainland India), Ezra Mir's film allowed for the depiction of 'Occidental' touches. It was found lewd and vulgar, displaying too much nudity and was 'repulsive to Indian ideals'.[85] A 'western atmosphere had replaced an Indian one.'[86] Wrote a critic *vis-à-vis* the film:

> Directors lose sight of the fact that India would be stumbling into degeneration if all the toilet-room and ball-room fashions and formalities are introduced in our pictures.[87]

Another critic was repelled by romance-adventure heroines in Bombay films 'smother[ing] a love song on lover's breast (after being all ice) like in modern drawing room.' She was like 'a fourteenth century lass' flirting in the manner of a modern 'artless virgin' who could become a 'coquette in a moment'.[88] The historical period referred to fits well with the efflorescence of high-Islamic culture in India. And the fact that Zubeida's performance in *Zarina* reminded critics both of modern 'toilet-room and ball-room fashions' *and* Madan's Tara, the dancer, indicates the confusion reigning in this period about Islamicate and modern registers of female sexuality. The problem seems to have been that the courtesan-actress could evoke *both* aristocratic-Islamicate and modern sexualities in modern and semi-historical films *alike* without apparent contradictions. The ethnoscapic vision could brook no hybrids.

These practices invoked the unruly consumption habits of popular culture that used 'Occidental touches' for mapping changing social mores – what has been called 'Americanization from Below'.[89] This was, for the critics, consumerism gone awry. *Bazaar* cinema was the soft underbelly of Indian modernisation. The nationalist leader Sarojini Naidu, whose sister Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya appeared in Bhavnani's

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[83] Kumar (1988), p.130.
[84] *BC*, 14 Apr., 1934.
[85] *VW*, 15 July, 1933, p.5.
[86] *FL*, New Year Issue, 1933, p.49.
[87] F Mohamed, 'Western Sex-plays and Indian Youths', *VW*, 15 July, 1933, p.12.
[88] *VW*, 15 July, 1933, p.9.
[89] Kaspar Maase, *BRAVO Amerika: Erkundungen zur Jugendkultur der Bundesrepublik in den funfziger Jahren* (Hamburg, 1992) quoted in Miriam Bratu Hansen, 'The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism' in Gledhill and Williams (2000), p.341.

Vasantasena in 1930, speaking at the Universal Art Circle, Bombay, in 1934 deplored 'a certain class of films by the Indian film industry and castigated a particular school of Indian music and Indian architects for being merely imitative of the West and lowering the artistic phases of the country in the eyes of the world and of Indians themselves.'[90]

On the other hand, the *chumban ki mimansa* – the resolution of adventures with a mouth-to-mouth kiss between the hero and heroine – was considered part of the retrograde India of the immediate past peopled exclusively by lower-class film audiences.[91] The erotic play of gazes between hero and heroine and between dancer and audience led to an overheated atmosphere in the hall. As one observer put it – 'the half educated crowds say that obscenity lay in the look.'[92] In such a context, the 'scandalously long' kissing scene in *Karma* (1933) featuring a respectable heroine such as Devika Rani became doubly problematic.[93]

Against the projected embourgeoisement of on- and off-screen feminine sexuality stood what the critics perceived as the Westernisation of screen romance through an Islamicate popular cultural idiom that was increasingly identified with lower and *nouveau riche* ('the brainless capitalists with limited knowledge of gunnies and hessians') classes. Joining the two registers of critique was the charge of ruthless commercialism against Bombay filmmakers and companies like Madan, who, according to the critics, were out to make fortunes at the expense of public morality. For the bourgeois critic, the courtesan-actress who combined all four registers of upper class-upper caste disquiet about the cosmopolitan cinema – of class, religion, culture and sexuality – was a convenient target. The dancing actress was the agency for the perceived unruly Westernisation of on-screen Indian sexuality *via* an Islamicate cultural register. The polysemic nature of the discourse against the courtesan-actress ensured its establishment as common sense in Indian society. The enemy thus came in a double register – an external one and an internal one. The disquiet about the external enemy – the perceived 'Westernisation' of the imagery of Indian films, especially in the realms of sexuality, was relayed first through a critique of the internal enemy – the existing Islamicate urban popular culture world. It was not Westernisation *per se* that disturbed the bourgeoisie, but a perceived unruly Westernisation of the masses through urban popular culture under the patronage of a rapacious commercial elite.

The Hindu Ethnoscape and Monumental Style in the New Realist Cinema

The emergent bourgeoisie's self-imaging as the leading class of the emerging Indian nation bracketed the new realist cinema's moral discourse. The primary aim of reform was to make cinema 'modern' while creating a cultural tradition for India. This modernising was not so much about abolishing existing forms of film production as it was about adding modern realist cinema to 'educate' audiences and wean them away from current modes of spectatorship.[94] It was expected that, over time, the new cinema would reform audience tastes based on essential 'Indian' traditional values and make a certain kind of cinema redundant. Without actively excluding certain forms of screen sexuality or cultural representation, bourgeois culture exerted itself as common

[90] *The Indian Review*, Apr.1934, p.285.
[91] 'Alochana aur Vinod', *Cinema Sansar*, 28 Jan., 1933, p.485. Henceforth *CS*.
[92] Krishna Mohan, 'Abhinay mein Aankhon ka Mahatva', *Chitrapat*, 2 Feb., 1934, p.22.
[93] *EIC*, p.257.
[94] NN Guha Chowdhury, BA, 'Art – Creative and Destructive', *VW*, 21 Jan., 1933, p.8.

sense that excluded by the sheer weight of a consensus about cultural values, created through political and cultural activism on extra-cinematic fronts. Bourgeois cinema was aligned with the literary tastes of the educated classes and the values preached in the educational system, themselves products of the rhetoric of nationalism and social reform. In the changed social context of cultural production, the cinema performer was projected as a public figure with the romantic aura of the creative bourgeois artist. In terms of the politics of Hindu cultural nationalism, the bourgeois artist was the successful and competent creator of the classical ethnoscape for Hindu India. In the context of the cinema, this entailed the redefinition of such fundamental terms as who could be considered an 'actor' and what style of performance could qualify as 'acting'. The bourgeois discourse on cinema in films and the media allocated the 'actor' and the art of 'acting' exclusively to social-realist cinema. The studio bosses, the stars and the media arrogated to themselves the prerogative to 'groom' the right kind of mode of address for the new cinema.

Davis, in his discussion of Japanese cinema in the inter-war period, describes how Japanese filmmakers sought to separate a high-cultural form of cinema from the popular *jidai geki* samurai films (very similar to the stunt cosmopolitan cinema of the silent period in India) to make a different kind of samurai film in a more classical style.[95] In India too, popular films were blamed for being copies of Western stunt films. As a contemporary critic cribbed, 'If gypsies and cowboys are not in India then the artistes have created them.'[96] Like mouth-to-mouth kissing, stunts were now dubbed 'Western' and unacceptable to elite classical sensibilities. Similarly, 'men and women in latest fashions and in cars and trains' were not a 'true' depiction of India.[97] A review of Imperial's *Wildcat of Bombay* held that the idea of rescues and fights had been borrowed from 'foreign pictures' and slammed Imperial for its 'steady backward progress'.[98] The eroticised actress in the adventure narratives presented the critics with a hybrid Islamicate-Hollywood representational regime, quite unfit for the purpose of constructing a spiritual Hindu ethnoscape.

However, as Davis argues, the institution of the monumental style 'inadvertently reveals the growing cosmopolitanism of Japanese popular culture.'[99] In fact, the monumental style was forged by adapting the classical Hollywood film-style to the presentation of traditional culture.[100] The monumental style was well in tune with Hollywood cinema's international style.[101] Paralleling their contemporaries in Japan, Indian filmmakers sought to distance themselves from the perceived unruliness of popular cinema by constituting classical paradigms of cinematic representation. Yet, in doing so, they emulated the classical Hollywood paradigm of melodramatic cinema. One new director put it, 'The masterly handling of the story, the natural and superb acting combined with excellent photography make the American talkies entertainment par excellence.'[102] The early New Theatres films were made under the supervision of American technicians from the RICO company.[103] The new companies

[95] Davis (1996), p.22.
[96] 'Cine-plays, Stories and Playwright – Is Imitation the Sole Ambition', *BC*, 27 Oct., 1934.
[97] VV Shirodkar, 'Our Cinema is an Over-Fondled Child', *BC*, 20 May, 1936.
[98] VP Sathe, 'Irrelevant Philosophy and Foreign Imitations: Technical Indifference and Stagey Direction', *BC*, 6 May, 1936.
[99] Davis (1996), p.46.
[100] Davis (1996), p.258.
[101] Davis (1996), p.41.
[102] MS Mohun, 'Western Talkies v Indian Talkies: An Appeal to Indian Producers', *BC*, 17 June, 1933.
[103] 'BN Sircar: Trendsetter in Cinematic Standards', *http://www.indiaabroaddaily.com*

constituted the star system on Hollywood lines through the studio system in order to attain a professional reputation and acclaim for making bourgeois realist cinema.

The question for the elite was thus not 'whether to modernise' but 'how to modernise'. The question was not even of the evil of dance *per se* but of the form such performance should take on the screen. Writing about the desired form of dance in cinema, a critic prescribed 'the idealism of Uday Shankar's dance' that depicted 'inner and deeper values'.[104] Uday Shankar's mystical internationalism of dance style fused ballet and folk dance to the complete satisfaction of the cultural requisites of neo-traditional modernisation. Critics and filmmakers were trying to put Indian cinema at par with an international style of literary cinema *à la* Hollywood by developing a neo-traditional cosmopolitan performative repertoire. The difference with popular cinema lay in the fact that bourgeois cinema copied Hollywood social realism, while the former copied Douglas Fairbanks. It was an effort to define the national within the international. Only this would establish their reputation as artists in the modern sense. In this period, bourgeois critics were worried that the Westernisation of popular culture was taking place through the Islamicate bazaar culture rather than through Sanskritised idioms.

History and Tradition

As in the case of the bourgeois stage, the Hindu bourgeoisie announced its entry into cinema by making a series of realist historical and mythological costume dramas. The discussions about historical and semi-historical films in the early 1930s reveal a holistic attitude that saw dress, décor and acting style as a single unit belonging to a particular cultural ethos. The ethnoscapic imagination that sought to evoke the correct cultural atmosphere for historical films was central to the bourgeois vision of history and social reality. The invention of a tradition needed an invention of history that could serve as an exemplar for the present. However, this invention of tradition was itself a paradoxical process in which tradition could function only when the past was clearly separated from the present such that the present could draw lessons from it *via* tradition. Thus defining the 'historicity' of history was central to this project. Allegory was the principal mode of imaging or textualising history to make it sufficiently 'historical' and yet fit contemporary sentiments and values.

History was thus recast as social melodrama, while the production of historical fiction went up. There was hardly any distance between historical fiction and the new Burckhardtian histories that sought to reveal the spirit of an age from the personalities of monarchs, statesmen, artists and intellectuals. The point in both genres was to present classical heroes as bourgeois heroes, as in Jadunath Sarkar's biography of Shivaji that constructed a Maratha chieftain of the eighteenth century as an inspirational figure for contemporary Indian politics. Similarly, the historical fiction of Romesh Chandra Dutt or the plays of DL Roy were attempts to use the past to inspire political action in the present. RC Dutt, emphasising the blurring of boundaries between history and fiction, confessed: 'I do not know if Sir Walter Scott gave me a taste for history or if my taste for history made me an admirer of Scott.'[105] He went on to write a number of novels that dramatised the Hindu-Muslim conflict in the pre-colonial period as allegories for contemporary nationalist consciousness.

[104] 'Dance-Dainty', *VW*, 4 Feb., 1933, pp.3-4.
[105] Mukherjee (1988), p.40.

Yet the creation of a separate 'historical' history as clearly delimited from the present inevitably involved questions of accuracy in its depiction. Details that broke the 'historical' atmosphere of a historical film were inadmissible. Moreover, the invention of tradition needed 'history' to be given a particular cultural characteristic that tradition could mediate – it had to be ethnoscapic. Traditions had to be rooted in an historical image that reflected the essence of an ancient culture. In India, this meant figuring out the correct religious atmosphere for history, for it to flow out in an essentialised series of religious images that stood for particular cultural traditions. No cross-referencing was admissible. Thus, in addition to anachronisms of historical detail, 'religious anachronisms' were taboo as well. However, religious anachronism had much more to do with the Hindu ethnoscapic vision of modern India than with the historicity of history. As was seen, the early Hindu historical films were thinly-veiled bourgeois family melodramas. In the monumental Hindu ethnoscapic cinema, to bring forward a statement of a respondent at the ICC proceedings, 'It is all mixed up. Political, religious, social, national, it is all the same thing'; and one might add, so were the historical and the modern.[106]

Expunging Islamicate Idioms

The bourgeois critique comprised two convergent projects to establish a Hindu upper class-upper caste ethnoscape for Bombay cinema. The first critiqued Urdu culture's influence on Hindu visual and performative cultures and on Indian culture in general, especially in the context of historical and semi-historical films. Films were classified into those meant for Hindu audiences and those for Muslims by attributing exclusive cultural symbols to the two religious cultures. Secondly, the new class of critics and filmmakers sought to reclaim the entire field of popular culture to fit bourgeois norms of national cultural consensus. They sought to appropriate elements of popular culture and cinema, groom them to fit the Hindu ethnoscape, and invent a tradition for themselves. *Pace* Ravi Vasudevan, it may be argued that the Bombay cinema was instrumental in creating an active hegemonic upper class-upper caste 'Hindu nationalist view-point' through its regimes of representation.[107] Although Vasudevan considers this true of the Bombay cinema after 1945, it will be argued that certain important classificatory reflexes encompassing registers of class, religion and sexuality were already in place by 1936 in the elite production houses of Bombay and Calcutta.

While the critique of stagy melodrama accused western Indian films of having 'no story or treatment',[108] there was also the notion that leading Bombay companies like Krishna and Imperial were succeeding with 'Muslim subjects'.[109] A critic reviewing *Lal-e-Yaman* – a film with a 'Muslim subject' – attributed the film's long run in Bombay to its appeal for the 'Muslim class', implying that Bombay was the centre of Islamicate cinema. The critic felt that such films were 'welcome entertainment' but 'They should not become order of day'.[110] When the editor of a leading Calcutta film magazine thundered against the "fortnightly 'Quality' production" from Bombay, he was probably alluding to Islamicate adventure-romance

[106] *ICCE*, v. I, p.372.
[107] Ravi S Vasudevan, 'Addressing the spectator of a "third world" national cinema: the Bombay "social" film of the 1940s and 1950s', *Screen*, v. 35, no. 4 , Winter 1995.
[108] Editorial, *FL*, 1 Apr., 1933.
[109] Editorial, *FL*, 2 July, 1932.
[110] *VW*, 23 Feb., 1934, pp.9-10.

films.[111] The general need to rescue cinema from the Bombay 'Quality' productions implied the need to rescue Indian cinema from Islamicate cinema as well.

The Parsi-style cinema was castigated for the 'Urdu brand cum Madan brand technique' of 'songs in trying situations' and the '*paijamas* and *achkans* of the Corinthian stage' that the 'unlettered audiences of Madan talkies' were used to. This style was particularly objectionable when used in *Shravan Kumar*, a film with an ostensibly pure Hindu content.[112] Through the pejorative use of such terms as 'Urdu' and '*paijamas* and *achkans*' the critic clearly indicated that his dislike for cosmopolitan cinema was in some measure due to its Islamicate nature. Also, it revealed the ethnoscapic vision that saw a discrepancy in depicting 'Hindu' characters in Islamicate dress. For the critic, the ethos of a particular form of melodrama was inextricably linked to a linguistic culture that was increasingly being constructed as Islamic and inimical to the Hindu ethnoscape. Another critic complained that 'Madan apes Bombay'[113] implying that the dominance of Parsi-stage style Islamicate cinema in Calcutta was due to the stranglehold of Bombay-type films on the market.

Similarly, criticism of the 'Muslim tinge in *Draupadi*'[114] revealed that critics were anxious to separate cultural symbols into watertight religious categories. The princess in *Bhakta Prahlad* (1932) was castigated for the double anachronism of 'wearing up-to-date footwear' and looking 'more like a Moslem princess' than a Hindu one.[115] Nabakumar in *Kapal Kundala* was criticised for sporting a modern '*Kandahar* cut hairstyle'.[116] It is worth noticing that all the names for modern hairstyles mentioned in these magazines – *Kabuli*,[117] *Kandahari*, *Peshawari* – owe their provenance to the Afghanistan-NWFP area. Again the critique encompassed an ambiguous evaluation of cultural symbols – the '*Kandahar* cut' stood for a modern hairstyle as well as a Muslim one. The sets of *Puran Bhakt* were criticised for using 'Saracenic paintings' and vases of 'Persian style'.[118] Another critic derided the use of *Allah* and *Khuda* in a film like *Sacred Ganges* (1932), especially when spoken by a Hindu character like Mahatma Vasudev. More disturbingly, the critic objected to the fact that all the actors in the cast were 'Mohamedan'.[119] Another critic objected to the use of Urdu for such Hindu stories like *Harishchandra*, *Shakuntala*, *Sati Savitri* and *Bhakta Prahlad*.[120]

Although the discussions about religious anachronism were restricted to historical details of films, the critics' discomfort with cross-over of religious symbols across representational boundaries was actually one about mixing contemporary cinematic modes of address. Thus the problem of the 'Muslim tinge' to *Draupadi* was not one of historicity, but of discomfort with a 'Hindu' character presented in what was presumed to be a 'Muslim' manner read off dress, décor and acting style. However, as was seen, the boundaries between religious iconographies were extremely porous in historical and contemporary practice. Thus ideas about representations of 'Hindu' (or for that matter 'Muslim') history were entirely based on

[111] Editorial, *VW*, 10 Feb., 1934.
[112] *FL*, 14 Jan., 1933, p.11.
[113] *FL*, 8 July, 1933, p.17.
[114] Editorial, *FL*, 3 June, 1933.
[115] *FL*, 18 June, 1932, p.17.
[116] *FL*, 27 May, 1933, p.30.
[117] The character playing *Joydev* was criticised for his *Kabuli* haircut. *FL*, 1 July, 1933, p.15.
[118] *FL*, 4 Mar., 1933, p.16.
[119] *FL*, 3 Dec., 1932, p.7.
[120] 'Universality vs. Narrowness', *FL*, 2 July, 1932, p.15.

contemporary utopian visions of Hinduism. A 'Hindu' presentation of *Draupadi* would have been equally ahistorical as was clear from what went in the name of historicity in films like *Puran Bhakt*. Yet a film-style that reflected contemporary social discourse on ideal Hinduism would have authenticated such a *Draupadi* in the critic's mind.

So what did religious anachronism consist of? It might be argued that it entailed more than just spotting misplacements of religious symbols. It stood for an entire performative repertoire. In the context of the discussions about the early talkies, this included on-screen sexuality as well. On the whole, discussions about religious anachronism and sexuality remained distinct. Yet if the *Kabuli* haircut for *Joydev* as a hybrid Islamicate-modern hairstyle was criticised as unfit for the Hindu ethnoscape, it was uttered in the same breath that condemned another Islamicate symbol – the eroticism of the *baijee* of Madan's cinema.[121] Also, the film critics' perception of *baijee*s as belonging to the 'Madan cum Urdu brand' of cinema made the connection between religiosity (Urdu), an entertainment form *tout court* (Islamicate cinema with its religious anachronisms) and a particular brand of sexual representation (the *baijee*) explicit. In such light, it is entirely possible that the religious anachronism of the 'Muslim tinge' in *Draupadi* might have included the sexuality of the actress. Considering that Zubeida in the role of a religiously neutral character reminded the critic of an Islamicate courtesan-actress, her much-criticised overt sexuality in *Mahabharata* might have evoked the courtesan alongside the religious anachronism of her 'up-to-date' wear. The mere presence of a courtesan-type actress in a 'Hindu' tale was a religious anachronism.

Such a censorial Hindu ethnoscapic vision would not have been surprising since the courtesan was seen as an integral element of Indo-Islamicate culture and was under attack from Hindu fundamentalist organisations in the 1930s as being inimical to the Hindu way of life. The social rhetoric of reform and historiographical tendencies have obscured the significance of such discourses in the history of Indian communalism. In the Hindi-Urdu language debates analysed by Christopher King, Urdu (and by extension the Muslims) was frequently personified by the *tawaif* in farcical representations of the confrontation, thus implying the moral dubiousness of Urdu linguistic culture.[122] This might have been the result of the ubiquity of Muslims in the performative universe of the *bazaar* and the commonsensical notion of Urdu being the language of the *kotha*. The direct result of these language debates that called for the expunging of Urdu words from Hindustani on moral grounds was felt in the Parsi theatre world in the 1910s when Hindu cultural nationalists pressurised theatre companies to compose plays in Sanskritised Hindi following 'Brahman dharma'. Thus began the Sanskritising of the Parsi theatre through the composition of religious plays in Hindi. And indeed the change of play content was seen as changing the entire performative repertoire of this theatre. 'Cheap romantic scenes' were replaced by sombre ones and a serious style of acting emerged. It became commonplace to say – *jab part badla to sabhi badle* (When the roles changed, everyone changed).[123] It needs to be emphasised that the changeover to Hindi, Hindu religiosity and a new acting style was accompanied by (as in the case of the Calcutta theatre) new sets more in line with the invented Hindu ethnoscape. As Hindu mythological subjects had been

[121] *FL*, 24 June, 1933.
[122] Christopher King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Delhi, 1994), pp. 135-137.
[123] Lakshminarayan Lal, *Parsi-Hindi Rangmanch* (New Delhi, 1973), pp.27-29.

presented in Urdu in Islamicate settings by the Parsi theatre from the nineteenth century, the project of writing Hindi mythological dramas was about recovering a Sanskritised Hinduism from the clutches of Islamicate culture. In some cases, controversies such as the one around the employment of Muslim actresses in the Alfred Theatrical Company's presentation of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in Lahore in 1916, went beyond questions of Urdu's sensuousness being inappropriate for Hindu mythological subjects to enforce an ethnoscapic vision that demanded Hindu characters be played only by Hindu performers. Not only were the actresses not allowed to appear, the female characters were played by men.[124] De-Urduising Hindi meant de-*tawaif*-ising it as well. Given this historical context, the cinematic ethnoscapic vision that connected language, religion, a performative ethos and sexuality was hardly surprising.

Thus, what emerges from the discussions about religious anachronism is that critics in this period considered each cinematic mode of address as a set of filmic codes consisting of language, dress, décor and gestures that *together* evoked a particular cultural ethos and a corresponding moral value. The multiple critiques of Islamicate cinema added up to a critique of an entire cinematic mode of address that mixed religious and cultural symbols of dress and décor and at the same time was overly sexualised. Thus the *Kabuli* haircut and the *baijee* actress went together to create an Islamicate ethnoscape in the critic's mind where one symbolic register (the religious anachronism of the *Kabuli* haircut) automatically presumed others – a language (Urdu) or a performer (the *baijee*). At a time when the Indian ethnoscape had to reflect Hindu spiritual values, Hindu and Islamicate motifs could not mix and the critic, playing the part of the modern Hindu patron of the arts, had to point out the anachronisms.

It is difficult to say what kind of modern cinema would have evolved if cosmopolitan cinema had been allowed to go on unchecked. There are indications that Urdu socials were being produced in the 1930s.[125] Yet this was hardly the continuation of the adventure-romance genre. However, thrillers like East India Film's *Night Bird* (1935), starring Nazir 'who played Chanakya in Chandragupta'[126] and Wadia's oeuvre provide some indication, in however attenuated form, of the way the genre might have modernised. On the other hand, as will be seen, the historic ethnoscape of *Chandidas* led directly to the modern *Devdas*.

The Historical Context For the Hindu Ethnoscape

As an ethnoscape is invoked to claim an ancestral homeland for inhabitants in the present, the recreation of an Hindu ethnoscape through historical cinema required an obfuscation between the past and the present. More importantly, the ethnoscape had to be created through distinctive religious iconographies. The iconographies of Hindu and Muslim stereotypes were often difficult to distinguish in real life. Swami Shraddhanand, the leading Sangathan leader in the 1920s, wore a beard and *jama-paijama* with a *fez* in his younger days. Equally, some of the Khoja leaders of Bombay could be hardly distinguished from their Hindu counterparts – moustachioed, wearing *dhoti* and shirt and sporting Kathiawari turbans. Religious differentiation in terms of costume was usually restricted to the orthodox. Common people were normally to be distinguished by regional rather than religious dress.

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[124] Vidyavati Namra, *Hindi Rangmanch aur Narayanprasad 'Betaab'* (Varanasi, 1972), pp.101-102.
[125] For example *Ah-e-Mazlumah* (1935) by Tonfilm of Calcutta. *BC*, 6 July, 1935.
[126] *BC*, 4 Aug., 1934.

Yet, by the 1930s, Shraddhanand had invented a new look for himself – clean-shaven, bald and wearing ochre – to signify his identity as a Hindu *sadhu*.[127] Concurrently, the Muslim elite were taking on a more orthodox Islamic or modern identity. People were falling back upon history to define the present. The neo-traditional elite were at the forefront of redefining religious symbolic boundaries through changes in their lifestyles. This was helped by the commercialisation of sartorial nationalism as more indigenous companies mass-produced *dhotis*, *kurtas* and *saris* and helped the spread of such fashions amongst the nationalistically oriented.[128] Such styles were then related in other symbolic fields to Hindu gods and goddesses, as when *Bharatmata* or Mother India was depicted as a woman clad in *sari* in the Hindu upper class-upper caste style. This dovetailed with the burgeoning traditions of depicting *sari*-clad goddesses in lithographs and idols, a trend that owed much to Ravi Varma's art. It is ironic that the *sari* was given a Hindu nationalist colour since the Hindu style of wearing the *sari* was essentially adapted in the nineteenth century from the styles of *sari*-wearing amongst Parsi women in Bombay.[129] *Sari*s were worn by a large number of north Indian women (including Muslims) in various styles. Over time, Rajput women in films began to be dressed in *saris* in the Hindu style when, until then, they had worn the *kurta-churidar* in films like *Rogue of Rajasthan*[130] or the *sari* in the north Indian style in many Rajput adventure dramas. This was the result of the adoption of the Hindu style of *sari*-wearing as the modern upper-class woman's dress across religious boundaries.[131]

Also, the Hindu-nationalist bourgeois uniform of the *kurta* was unambiguously borrowed from Muslim courtly culture and Hinduised through sanctification by upper class-upper caste use. The *paijama-achkan* in contrast was seen as an indubitable marker of Islamic culture. In 1915, Phalke's *Ahilyoddhar* featured Indra in *paijama-achkan* following contemporary Parsi theatrical practice. In the 1932 Prabhat film *Ayodhyecha Raja*, a version of the Harishchandra story, Indra was portrayed in line with sculptural motifs borrowed from Hindu temples – barebodied and *dhoti*-clad. The passage of Indra from *Indrasabha* (the most popular Parsi play) into the portals of neo-brahmanical cinema signified the selective canonisation and exclusion of various Islamicate cultural motifs informing the definition of upper caste-upper class culture. The much castigated *paijama-achkan* might have been worn by Hindus as well, but since they evoked the world of Islamicate courtly culture they were now defined as non-Hindu. As a film critic put it succinctly while emphasising proper make-up, costume and grooming for performers: 'Dress gives man a rough idea of character and personality.'[132] The 'rough idea of character and personality' invoked by the *paijama-achkan* or *nautch* was a Muslim one. The *sari* and *kurta* were admissible into the portals of high Hindu culture whereas the *kurta-churidar* or the *paijama-achkan* were not.

[127] See JTF Jordens, *Swami Shraddhananda: His Life and Causes* (Delhi, 1981).
[128] For changes in sartorial styles in the1920s and 1930s, see Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (London, 1996).
[129] 'Courtly Couture', *Hindustan Times*, 23 Aug., 1999.
[130] *Indian Cinema: A Visual Voyage* (New Delhi, 1998), p.15.
[131] On the advent of the *sari* amongst fashionable classes in North India in the 1930s, see Prem Nath Bazaz, *Daughters of the Vitasta* (New Delhi, 1959), pp.249-250.
[132] Kirit Ghosh, 'Make Up', *FL*, 6 May, 1933, p.14.

Techniques of the Hindu Ethnoscape

What the critics were trying to convey through arguments about popular cinema's poor technique was that it was not fit for the purposes of inventing a tradition. Criticising the vogue for popular cinema, the editor of a leading film magazine wrote, 'The uncultured commoner gives nothing to technique.'[133] Yet the critique of popular cinema did not stop at the recognition of simple ontological difference between narrational techniques. Technique had a cultural meaning as well. Unlike in the 1920s, now good technique had to be conveyed through moral tales that excised the sexual charms of the star. Good technique was to be used to film images of virtue and not the glamour of the dancing star. The trope of 'technique' was crucial to the bourgeois discourse on cinema as it was in direct competition with popular cinema in the exhibition market. It was necessary to convince audiences that the popular films they watched were not worthy of consumption as they were of poor quality in the very physical sense of being badly shot or badly put together. The argument of poor technique was buttressed in turn by a cultural one that suggested to spectators that poor images portrayed their cultural experiences 'wrongly'. Also, as was clear from the discussion about disciplining narratives, an attempt was made to portray this cinema as obsolete and out of date. They were admissible as 'welcome entertainment', as quaint curios from the past but nothing more. Technique and culture were inextricably linked in the bourgeois critique of popular cinema, a strategy that emphasised that the sheer mechanical quality of cinema was nevertheless based on visions of culture and a cultural vision of society. The moral reading of technique implied that popular cinema was symbolic of the retrograde past or a corrupt present and therefore unfit for the modern present and bourgeois artistic recognition. Popular cinema was being asked to adapt or perish.

Christopher King, tabulating the nineteenth-century language debates that pitted Urdu against Hindi as the *lingua franca* for North India, notices a similar phenomenon. 'One of the most striking things implicit in these tables is the close relationship between technical and 'moral aspects', i.e., technical defects lead to moral or aesthetic failings.'[134] King's description of these debates shows that the creation of an economic clientele for cultural products in the public sphere was central to the success or failure of any cultural debate. Goods (in King's case, languages) had to be sold to new audiences in ways that not only emphasised their cultural superiority but also projected their technical sophistication in comparison with rival products. This was all the more true for a technological medium like the cinema.

In contrast to the critique of *bazaar* cinema's historical inaccuracies, claims to cultural realism based on correct invocation of the Hindu ethnoscape were backed by efforts at archaeological verisimilitude and were advertised as conclusively superior to the perceived frivolity of the popular cinema. Thus, Anath Moitra, son of historian Akshoy Kumar Moitra, was called upon by Pramathesh Barua to design the sets for his historical *Anath*.[135] *Sonyachi Dwarka*, a Marathi talkie, announced that it had "spent a great deal in getting the richly decorated scenes to suit the 'Pauranik' atmosphere".[136] Adarsh Chitra's *Dhuwandhar* boasted 'purely Oriental settings designed by Mr NN Sil, BA, BL'.[137] Countless historical or semi-historical films in this period claimed

[133] Editorial, *FL*, 14 Jan., 1933.
[134] King (1994), p.183.
[135] *FL*, 18 June, 1932, p.6.
[136] *BC*, 10 June, 1933.
[137] *TOI*, 15 June, 1935.

authentic period settings. This was reminiscent of the appreciation for the 'realistic' décor of the Calcutta stage worked out in the 1920s by set designers Ramendranath Chatterjee and Charu Roy in collaboration with the archaeologist RD Banerjee.[138] Roy went on to work extensively with Himansu Rai and a number of film companies in Calcutta and Bombay.[139]

These historical claims made by artists in the industry were endorsed by the critics and the audiences. The imagined historicity of historical films was legitimised as 'authentic' versions of Indian culture. A critic praising the 'ideal hermitage situation' in Debaki Bose's *Seeta* rhapsodised:

> Luxuriant vegetation interspersed with cottages under the cool shade of spreading trees with a small channel running by and adorned with a simple bamboo bridge and close by was a tiny cascade with its shimmering waters – all reminiscent of the old days of the 'Ramayan'.[140]

Prabhat's *Amar Jyoti* was praised for its 'slow tempo of dialogue, music, silent interludes and beauty of natural surroundings', all given 'artistic significance'. The review concluded that the film was 'in more than one sense – a leaf from the Indian landscape.'[141] Here the historical Hindu ethnoscape was conflated with an 'Indian landscape'. Through such strategies of representation, the Hindu past and the Indian present were melded together in the spectator's reading of the film. Making this culturally significant was the 'artistic significance' of the 'slow tempo' demonstrating the 'epic scale' and 'hieratic gravity' of the monumental style.

The monumental style enforced a moralistic reading of on-screen action in terms of the contemporary rhetoric of nationalism and social reform. Behind such claims to authenticity of décor was the greater claim of technical competence in portraying the authentic ethnoscape that made on-screen allegorical historical action meaningful. It was important to define a particular representational regime, marked by a religious definition of ritual, setting, dialogue and dress. The ethnoscape allowed modern viewers to recognise history through reference to 'traditional' institutions as temples, priests, monuments or images culled from popular print and fiction in the present. The editor of a Gujarati film magazine praised New Theatre's *Rajrani Meera* for its 'realistic temple scenes', and its authentic depiction of *arti*.[142]

Technically 'correct' temples, rituals, scenes of traditional Hindu households and realistic village life that defined the artistic excellence of Hindu historical films were, however, backdrops for fleshing out a new acting style – one borrowed from stage realism. The new acting style helped make the décor and therefore, the particular brand of representation of the past, more plausible. The same relationship between acting and setting defined the verisimilitude of Hindu bourgeois social realist cinema that claimed to accurately depict the daily life of the bourgeoisie. Ritualised interaction between members of families, between men and women and between workers and bosses and amongst workers themselves, played out against 'real' settings, defined the family romance of both the Hindu historical and bourgeois realist cinema. The next logical step was to transfer the atmospherics of the historical film to social cinema in modern settings, a step not long in coming.

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[138] Mukherjee (1982), pp.185-188.
[139] *EIC*, p.201.
[140] *TC*, Jan.1934, p.71.
[141] *BC*, 8 July, 1936.
[142] Editorial, *VW*, 25 Nov., 1933, p.4.

This became apparent when the neo-Vaishnava spirit of historical films like *Chandidas* found clear resonance in realist films like *Devdas*. Indeed, the silent version of the tale produced in 1929 by Eastern Film Syndicate was praised in the Bengali journal *Nachghar* for its distinct Bengali feel, quite unlike the Madan style.[143] The Madan style was clearly unsuitable for a brahmanical Bengali-Hindu ethnoscapic vision of Devdas. It is not a coincidence that Saigal, the lead player in *Devdas*, acted in the Hindi version of *Chandidas* made in 1934.[144] He thus lent both films his particular persona of the neo-traditional dilettante artist lost in the modern world. Produced by the same studio (New Theatres), the heroes in both the films were identified by their inability to consummate their romantic relationships with women due to social pressure. Both films featured the phenomenon of caste coming between star-crossed lovers. The women in both the films were portrayed as victims of vicious social taboos and iconographically were forever worshipful of the main male characters (visualised through scenes of feet-touching or by lying at the feet of men). Both films had very similar songs, musical styles and a classical style of dialogue delivery. The new social cinema was devoted to an elaboration of classical gestures and stylised realism to portray family dramas.[145] Films like *Chandidas* and *Devdas* were marked by long takes and slow camera movement to emphasise the classicism of the acting style and dialogue delivery, well in line with the tenets of the monumental style. This style was endorsed by bourgeois critics like NN Guha Chowdhury who listed the ethos of *Ras Lila* and Sahajiya Vaishnavism, espoused by film heroes like Chandidas/Devdas, among the artistic norms that could guide the future of Indian cinema. The other art form that could guide Indian cinema was the acting of Greta Garbo in *Mata Hari*.[146] The neo-medieval effortlessly melded with the early twentieth century modern in the critic's reaction, conjoined through imaging of such abstract spiritual values as self-sacrifice, chastity and the forceful personalities of Chandidas/Devdas and Mata Hari.

The rhetoric of nationalism and social reform was suffused with the language of spirituality that added force to neo-traditional modernisation.[147] In the Indian context, this meant defining spirituality in terms of religious symbols. Nita Kumar describes the efforts of neo-traditional educational institutions to harness bodily dispositions and gestures of students towards a more Hindu idiom of ideal social conduct. Morning prayers, corporeal regimes of gestures of respect and deference to authority and a generally restrained code of social conduct were introduced in schools in Banaras from the 1920s. Her discussions make it clear that special emphasis was placed on the pedagogy of gestures for women, to inculcate ideal social behaviour based on restraint and social idealism.[148] She notes that Hinduism was being invented by the upper castes and classes by institutionalising 'an atmosphere and certain rituals' characterised by practices and bodily gestures such as folding hands in greeting, touching elders' feet and scriptural training.[149] The discourse of disciplining the young through tradition was reflected in the critics' appreciation of *Puran Bhakt* for depicting the 'worship of Rishis in forest', the 'unconquerable religious meditation of Guru' and the 'heaven loving countenance of *Kumar*' – values Puran could easily

[143] *EIC*, p.251.
[144] *EIC*, p.259.
[145] On the centrality of the family drama in popular realist cinema, see Vasudevan (2000), pp.134-137.
[146] NN Guha Chowdhury, 'Art – Creative and Destructive', *VW*, 21 Jan., 1933, p.8.
[147] On the Indian, and especially the Bengali intelligentsia's appropriation of history and spirituality to define nationalism, see Chatterjee (1993).
[148] See Nita Kumar, *Lessons From Schools: the History of Education in Banaras* (Delhi, 2000).
[149] Kumar (2000), p.101.

have learnt in one of the neo-traditional schools Kumar describes. The same could have been said about Devdas.

As was seen in the discussion about elite perceptions of *nautch*, the Hindu elite was now distancing itself from popular cultural practices and trying to restructure them to become the core of a neo-classical Hindu culture. This allowed them to simultaneously celebrate elements of feudal culture and project a modern image. This was the same period when Tagore was praising Bankim Chatterjee for having weaned Bengal readers away from the *dastaan* tradition.[150] Yet what Bankim did was to incorporate a healthy dose of the *dastaan* style into his own historical fiction that translated Scott's ethnoscape into a Hindu-Rajput one. Similarly, the problem of the Muslim ethos of the Rajput films was solved by fusing contemporary modernising Rajput princely ceremonial attire (now deemed Hindu-modern) with Islamicate settings.[151] It is not surprising that companies like New Theatres and Prabhat dedicated to the creation of the Hindu ethnoscape came up in a period when the feudal Hindu elite in India were modernising.[152] Davis too notes that the monumental style was based on the canonisation of the past, an exaltation of the nativist aesthetic and the celebration of feudal social structures.[153]

Ravi Vasudevan has noted that the premier Bombay film magazine *FilmIndia* claimed a natural connection between modernising social reform and modern Hinduism. This commonsensical attitude towards nation and tradition that saw India's past as exclusively Hindu relegated Islamicate film habits to the exotic – the historical or the Arabian Nights fantasy film.[154] It may be argued that the Arabian Nights-type film dovetailed with the Hindu bourgeois observer's ethnoscapic mindset by recreating the monumental style for a purely Muslim ethos. Yet, as a critic put it, such films were only 'welcome entertainment'; serious cinema could only be Hindu social-reform cinema.[155] *Chandidas* with its brand of Vaishnava spirituality was the real 'Indian' cinematic style. The other types of films that demonstrated Islamicate influence were either purged of such influences and the useful Islamicate elements like dialogue, décor and costume Hinduised (as in the case of the Hindu historical films) or were relegated in discourse to the ranks of lower class entertainment (as in the case of the stunt films).

The bourgeoisie's claim to leadership of the industry, honed through discussions about the 'historicity' of 'historical' films was thus a subset of the larger claim to order all social reality – historical and contemporary. It was aimed at a situation where Indians were 'not likely to be able to distinguish Hinduness from Indianness with any ease' even when claiming to create entertainment for secular citizens of the India-to-be.[156] The Hindu bourgeoisie was seeking to replace Islamicate melodramatic entertainment with its own version of melodramatic realism. If the

[150] Mukherjee (1988), pp.40-41.
[151] For a description of the modernisation of the princes in the 1920s and 1930s, see Charles Allen and Sharda Dwivedi, *Lives of the Indian Princes* (London, 1984).
[152] On the Bengal landed gentry's entry into the world of culture and the establishment of a communalised high brahmanical feudal ethos for Bengali culture, see Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge, 1994).
[153] Davis (1996), p.41.
[154] Vasudevan (2000), p.156.
[155] *VW*, 23 Feb., 1934, pp. 9-10.
[156] John Stratton Hawley, 'The Saints Subdued: Domestic Virtue and National Integration in *Amar Chitra Katha*' in Lawrence A Babb and Susan S Wadley (eds.), *Media and Transformation of Religion in South Asia* (Delhi, 1997), p.131.

monumental ethnoscape for India was about 'the need to translate Mahabharat stories into ultra-modern ideas',[157] popular cinema was certainly not the right vehicle for it. Dances, Islamicate costumes and songs at the wrong places interrupted the monumentalism of this cinema – be it historical or social realist. If *Puran Bhakt* led directly to images of Vivekananda in the spectator's allegorical reading, *Chandidas* led to *Devdas*. Such a reading could not be contaminated by features like *nautch* that presented a baffling hybrid of Islamicate and Western cultural motifs. For such a project, the popular cinema *tout court* presented an Islamicate-modern ethos that was, to quote Mary Douglas, 'matter out of place'[158] and the bourgeoisie's role was to correct the situation.

Cinema Halls, Family Entertainment and Realist Cinema

As is apparent from the critics' discourse that connected film-types to certain audience-types (for example, 'the unlettered audiences' of the Madan talkie), the reform of cinema was ultimately intended to classify audiences. The aim was to clear up the confusion that clubbed popular and elite cinema together in the same cinema hall. The confusion about audience categories was well summarised by the same Lahore critic when he said 'Since *Ben Hur*, *Grand Hotel*, *Sign of the Cross*, *Puran Bhagat*, *Zarina* have all had equal successes one wonders what the audience wants.'[159] Against such confusion of taste, another critic warned against the 'suicidal practice' of exhibitors of 'releasing any picture in any theatre irrespective of class of picture or taste of patrons'. Many good pictures were "'killed' like this". According to him, a clear-cut classification relating film, studio and class to cinema halls would help fix film-hire prices and make life easier for film companies, distributors and exhibitors.[160] Class distinctions mapped on to the cinema halls would help rationalise returns from the halls as opposed to the wildly fluctuating returns if films of all classes were shown in the same hall. An increasing stress on the 'reputation' of cinema halls was central to this argument. If respectable films were shown in halls that also showed disreputable ones, the respectable classes would stay away.

The precedent for this reform was in the transformation of the Calcutta theatres in the 1920s where a reform of the content of plays had gone hand in hand with changes in viewing practices and the theatre hall itself. The rise of realist theatre in the 1920s was accompanied by a change in audience profile as the educated classes flocked to the new plays. The new theatre of the 1920s took off from where the Parsi theatre had left off and defined itself in opposition to it. As one historian of the Indian stage noted,

> The rival Urdu stage, by means of its revolving stage, its clever comedians, and its introduction of Anglo-Indian girls on the stage for revue performances in the midst of patched-up plays, exerted a debasing influence on the morale of the legitimate theatre.[161]

When Sisir Bhaduri opened his production of *Seeta*, he removed the dancing girl statuettes (symbolic of the Parsi theatre) in the theatre and had them replaced with holy water pitchers, as a symbolic gesture of the change in the moral framework of

[157] JN Mozumdar, 'Cultural Aspects of Our Films – I', *VW*, 25 Feb., 1933, p.18.
[158] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1969).
[159] *TC*, Sept. 1933, pp.38-39.
[160] G Ramasheshan, 'The Distributor and his Difficulties', Editorial, *FL* Puja Special, 1932.
[161] Yajnik (1969), p.252.

the Calcutta stage.[162] The gesture signified a theatre from which the *sakhis* disappeared and the use of female ballet was reduced. It was also a theatre dedicated to historical verisimilitude and a restrained 'realist' acting style. Its audiences no longer consisted of 'idle rich men belonging to the landowning class, small traders, shopkeepers, artisans and middle-class men from the city and the suburbs.' It now included bourgeois women as well.[163] The theatre halls themselves were transformed as ticketed shows became *de rigeur* and a 'well coordinated audience consisting of nobles, commoners, ladies, attendants in graded seats' became the standard.[164] Men and women were increasingly seated together and the separate gallery for women fell into disuse. Moreover, 'the rowdy elements took to the talkies'.[165] Ticket prices were higher than cinema-hall rates (Bhaduri set the price at rupee one, while the average cinema ticket cost eight annas).[166] A separate sphere of elite popular culture that significantly influenced the early Calcutta talkies was formulated through the 1920s.

In a similar vein, one of the main reasons for the turn to respectability was the fact that 'respectable' women and children increasingly visited cinema halls during the talkie boom. Film-watching was increasingly projected as a genteel family affair. *Devdas*, for example, was praised as a film that even children could see.[167] With women and children becoming an important market segment, the atmosphere of the cinema hall had to be reformed through the reform of sexuality depicted on screen. In contrast, according to one critic, Madan's *Laila Majnu*, which ran for weeks in Lahore, was 'seen only by low-bred people' because of "the instinct of the 'loafer element'" it embodied.[168] Another film was deemed so obscene that a certain 'gentleman with family' had to walk out of the hall.[169] Time and again, critics singled out dances as 'not suitable for women and children'[170] in arguing against the 'Bombay brand'[171] of cinema. Technique, class and morality repeatedly came together in the critics' evaluation of cinema and its social worth.

In the context of such a vision of reformed cinema, Vishwambhar Prasad 'Premi Visharad' writing in *Rangbhumi*, opined that the popular films of the times, especially those of Madan, were unfit for women, children and respectable society because of their dances and kisses.[172] Another article in *Cinema Sansar* wondered why every silent film had to end in a '*chumban ki mimansa*' – the mouth-to-mouth kiss climax.[173] VM Inamdar, in an article entitled 'What Leads to Mediocre Film Production', felt that love scenes led to 'mob exulting over obscenities and things likely to offend average taste' and had a 'demoralising and debasing effect'. In contrast, he praised *Achhut Kanya* for its 'complex psychology'. It was a film where 'passions are effectively revealed in situations that logically develop into a thrilling climax.'[174] Love had to be integrated into the narrative flow of realist cinema, the

[162] Mukherjee (1982), pp.185-188.
[163] Mukherjee (1982), pp.152-158.
[164] Mukherjee (1982), pp.185-188.
[165] Mukherjee (1982), pp.152-158.
[166] Mukehrjee (1982), pp.185-188.
[167] *BC*, 23 Nov., 1935.
[168] Anand, 'Sidelights of the Indian Screen', *VW*, 1 Apr., 1933, p.10.
[169] Dharmadutt Sharma, 'Bharatiya Chitrapat', *CS*, 31 Dec., 1932.
[170] Vishwambhar Sahay 'Premi Visharad', 'Savaak Chitrapaton Mein Gayan ka Chunav', *Rangbhumi*, 11 Sept., 1932, p.7.
[171] *FL*, New Year Issue, 1933, p.49.
[172] 'Premi Visharad', *Rangbhumi*, 11 Sept., 1932, p.7.
[173] 'Alochana aur Vinod', *CS*, 28 Jan., 1933, p.485.
[174] *BC*, 5 Aug., 1936

passion given a logic rather than standing out as a showpiece of erotic display in and for itself, drawing the gaze more acutely to the dynamics of physical intimacy.

Respectable observers were much exercised by the 'mob's' behaviour *vis-à-vis* the action on the screen. Indeed, the cinema hall atmosphere went against the grain of genteel behaviour. Not only were the crowds noisy, they smoked and spat in the halls as well.[175] During *Pardesi Pritam*, they reacted lewdly to words like *mastikhori* with phrases like *kaisi mouj aayi* (What pleasure!).[176] In the same article, the writer alleged that the four-anna class of spectators came only to watch female stars like Madhuri. Indeed, the writer accused Imperial of exploiting this class' weakness for Madhuri by naming its production *Miss Madhuri* (a film that actually starred Sulochana). Whatever the truth of his accusation, it illustrates the fact that educated observers made a straightforward connection between on-screen female sexuality and lower class presence in cinema halls. What is ironic in the context of the critic's discomfort at the four-anna class spectator's reaction to words like *mastikhori* is that *mauj-masti* was central to the popular culture of north Indian towns shared by elite and workers alike. Nita Kumar describes it as 'a philosophy of pleasure moulded to the truth of life'.[177]

The other disturbing trend for the studios was the fact that the extreme popularity of the talkies encouraged a black market in tickets. Eight-anna tickets for *Alam Ara* sold for twenty five rupees on the black market.[178] About the *goonda*s in charge of the black market in cinema halls in Calcutta, one observer wrote: 'By their appearance, demeanour and mode of dress they did not seem bona-fide audience.' They were 'uncultured young men'. The fact that such incidents involved 'respectable' halls like Chitra, owned by BN Sircar of New Theatres, added to the distress of bourgeois observers.[179] It is clear from the critic's ambiguous tone that the black marketeers were not of the working or lower classes. The discourse on the *budmash* or the *goonda* in the newspapers in this period showed that the 'loafer class' or the 'unlettered audiences' of the Madan-type cinema were probably Muslims[180] and were becoming a law and order problem for the bourgeoisie. *Goondas* now included disgruntled Muslim youths from the lower echelons of the middle classes. Realist cinema had to step in either to separate the rowdy elements from the 'bona-fide audience' or to gradually wean the former into respectable ways.

The industry handled the problem in a variety of ways. In some halls, this problem was resolved by providing separate seating arrangements for the sexes.[181] *Zenana* shows for women were on the rise.[182] In Bombay, the *zenana* shows of Bombay Talkies' *Jawani ki Hawa* drew packed houses and the hall was besieged by 'hundreds of women', dispersing only when promised an extra show. This could have created problems: 'Some enterprising photographers on the point of snapping the unusual scene were stopped in the nick of time by an alarmed manager.' Devika Rani, star of both *Achhut Kanya* and *Jawani ki Hawa* made a speech appealing to 'her

[175] *CS*, 31 Dec., 1932, p.435.
[176] *CS*, 1 Apr., 1933, p.650.
[177] Kumar (1988), p.99.
[178] Mushtaq Gazdar, *Pakistan Cinema, 1947-1997* (Karachi, 1997), pp.8-9.
[179] *VW*, 18 Mar., 1933, p.5.
[180] OIOC, L/R/5/98, p.5.
[181] *CS*, 4 Feb., 1933, p.515.
[182] Nevile (1999), pp.152-167.

sisters' to contribute 'their culture and abilities' to the growing industry.[183] Likewise, Sabita Devi made a personal appearance at the *zenana* show of *Jivan Lata* (1936) with a 'powerful plea for the abandonment of the attitude that regarded a screen career as something leading to loss of respectability and social status.'[184] However, there is evidence that educated women were coming into the cinemas in large numbers irrespective of *zenana* shows. Pran Nevile, in his account of the Lahore film culture in the 1930s mentions going to cinema halls for the express purpose of seeing educated women in the audience.[185]

As Miriam Hansen has cogently argued, classical-realist cinema developed out of a need to balance the discrepancies between its sensuous images of utopia and the industrial-capitalist discipline of labour necessary to generate spending power that could make film audiences possible in the first place. As audiences grew more heterogeneous in terms of class, gender, ethnicity and age, one of the critical areas in which control was exerted was the filmic depiction of sexuality and familial behaviour so that cinema did not destabilise socio-cultural meanings of gender and family.[186] Standardised well-told literary films were expected to conform to genteel tastes as well as keep the circuits of desire and voyeurism under control. In the case of Bombay, star images of bourgeois performers had to be manipulated to exhort audiences, especially women, to modernise but within the limits of cultural respectability defined by the Hindu ethnoscape. It is not surprising then that the 1934 talkie remake of the silent classic *Gunsundari* was a more traditional version of the original.[187]

In an era when audiences were getting more and more complex in terms of class, religion, age and gender, realist cinema, with its particular mode of address that demanded of its audience absorbed attention in the narrative while providing entertaining performative interludes of songs and star appeal, became a viable formula to please the maximum number of people at the same time.[188] This meant that it also became the biggest money-spinner in the long term. Stars and good music were durable goods that could rationalise returns in a better way than pot-boilers which were more hit-and-miss affairs. The peculiar nature of the talkies – the fact that they included sound and music – had a very important role to play in the rise of the discourse on bourgeois family entertainment in 'respectable' circles. Music, reclaimed from the world of the courtesans, was now considered a secular space to which women and children could have sanctioned access. Music schools to train middle-class children mushroomed all over India.[189] Accomplishment in music became a valorised virtue for young girls, a sign of middle-class respectability and modernisation.[190]

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[183] *TOI*, 5 Oct., 1935
[184] *TOI*, 18 Sept., 1936.
[185] Nevile (1999), pp.152-167.
[186] Hansen (1996), p.86.
[187] *EIC*, p.259.
[188] On the development of cinema of 'narrative absorption' in the context of heterogeneous audience profiles, see Hansen (1996), p.87.
[189] Nevile (1999), pp.146-151.
[190] The cinema industry itself acknowledged this with a large number of films featuring child singing stars amongst whom Shahu Modak and Feroze Dastur were the most popular. Shahu Modak's debut in *Shyam Sundar* and Feroze Dastur's role in *Lal-e-Yaman* ensured that these films were the biggest hits in the Bombay circuit in the early talkie years. Fantasy films featuring child stars thus brought a new dimension to the audience profile.

But equally, the artisan-music connoisseur of Kumar's Banaras could also participate in spectatorship, albeit from a lower-priced seat. Music was for all classes. While some could enjoy the sexuality of the heroine provided they kept quiet, the rest partook of music. Thus the classicised family entertainer promised to please everybody. If this meant sacrificing the overt sexuality of the cosmopolitan cinema, such a step guaranteed financial and cultural success. Yet it needs to be stressed that the main audience being addressed through the monumental style mode of address was the burgeoning bourgeois audience, a fact that was becoming evident from the growth of cinemas in suburban Bombay[191] – the bastion of the new Hindu middle classes of the 1930s – and the rise of the picture palace showing Bombay films in towns all over India. Countless reviews in this period stressed the large presence of educated people in the halls.[192] Films like *Devdas* were popular in city and suburb alike.[193] Prabhat's *Amarjyoti* was being watched by 'people from suburbs on BB&CI and GIP railways' and 'even children'.[194] Lesser halls in Bombay like Edward were holding festivals of New Theatres films.[195]

The reform of cinema-hall atmosphere through revision of the content of films was a new element in the public discourse about cinema. The earlier elite had simply shunned the halls, allowing boisterous performance-oriented film-watching habits. The talkie boom and the concurrent entry of middle-class families into the cinema halls changed all this. The enormous expansion of audiences during the talkie boom brought in huge profits for the exhibition business. By the mid-1930s, a clear-cut division had evolved between halls catering for the upper classes and those for the lower classes. Such trends had already begun earlier. Class divisions in 1920s Bombay were roughly reflected in the division into first-run and second-run cinema halls, located respectively in the city centre and the suburbs. However, film companies did not make different films for the two kinds of audience. Rather, the halls were only distinguished by a lag in the release dates of films. But the cinema-hall classification of the 1930s had new characteristics. The new discourse on respectability posited an actual difference in the fare served in the various categories of halls.

In the 1930s, a class division corresponding to the earlier compartmentalisation of halls showing imported and Bombay films appeared in the context of the Indian films as well. Certain halls were earmarked for the superior Bombay or Calcutta productions which were shown alongside imported films in the early talkie period. Run-of-the-mill popular fare was not exhibited in these halls.[196] Rumours about the reputations of certain halls kept top producers away from them.[197] The stratification of cinema halls was a direct result of the enormous profits made in the exhibition circuit during the talkie boom that allowed exhibitors to build new cinema halls in various parts of cities, each catering to a distinct class of public. 1934 saw the start of theatre syndicates – Western India Theatres Limited, Poona, Model

[191] Most cinema-hall building in Bombay in the 1930s and 1940s took place in the northern suburbs. In 1947, the year of Indian independence, of the 16 halls sanctioned, 11 were located in this region. *ARBP*, 1947, pp.50-51.
[192] For example, the review of *Dr. Madhurika*, *BC*, 29 Jan., 1935.
[193] *BC*, 8 July, 1936.
[194] *BC*, 2 Sept., 1936.
[195] *BC*, 5 Jan., 1935.
[196] *CS*, 4 Feb., 1933, p.515. The magazine reported that top grade halls were refusing to accept Sharda's *Vikramcharitra*.
[197] 'Vaachaal Chitrapat aur Cinemagharon ka Abhaav', *CS*, 28 Jan., 1933, p.484.

Theatres Limited, Ahmedabad and India Pictures Limited, Calcutta – controlling the release of films by the leading production houses.[198] The growing professionalisation of the exhibition circuit was aimed at promoting the new companies bringing in the new realist cinema. For example, Western India Theatres Limited dealt with Prabhat films and India Pictures Limited dealt with New Theatres films.

1933 marked the opening of Regal at the junction of the Fort and Colaba, only the second building in Bombay to have air-conditioning. With its art-deco façade, Regal set the standard for the upper-class halls showing Indian films and obliged them to improve their amenities. The same year saw the opening of Minerva talkies, another first-run hall for Indian films.[199] The West End was taken over by Ranjit studios and renovated in 1933.[200] It was 'brightened up with new tilt chairs in the balcony'. The 'other classes' too were provided with comfort and conveniences. The sound system was improved and 'artistic lighting arrangements' gave it an altogether upmarket look.[201] In 1934, Roxy was taken over by Kapurchand of Super talkies, renovated and turned to showing only top-line Indian productions.[202] As in the case of the theatre halls of Calcutta in the 1920s, realist entertainment, bourgeois patronage of public spaces of performance, the entry of women and the improvement of hall interiors went hand in hand with the exit of the 'rowdy classes'. From now on, realism and respectability became indelible boundaries between classes of film audiences, a division that was physically marked on the cinema-hall map of any Indian city. This also meant that the better cinema halls became home to the upper caste-upper class ethnoscape. By 1936, a film like *Achhut Kanya* was opening with fanfare at Roxy for its 'All India Premiere', the whole event marking the maturity of the distribution circuits for Bombay films.[203]

One of the principal reasons why the stratification of cinema halls in the 1930s became a stable affair was the economic logistics of talkie exhibition. Right through the 1920s, silent-cinema exhibition was based on a two-week exhibition schedule. A four-week run was considered a hit.[204] Very few films crossed this limit and most films depended on extended re-runs for making profits. However, with the advent of the talkies, the definition of a hit changed substantially. Though *Shyam Sundar*'s run of over 25 weeks[205] in the early talkie era can be attributed to a lack of supply, a run of 15 weeks for *Amritmanthan* in 1934[206] was definitely because of a change in exhibition scheduling. In April 1935, it was still running in Bombay in its 29th week.[207] The legendary all-India runs of *Devdas* and *Achhut Kanya* in the years that followed bear out durable changes in the exhibition scheduling effected by the talkie revolution. The industry could now risk extended runs for films based on the profits made through the spectacular increase in spectatorship in the early talkie years. Moreover, the number of prints per film for productions of well-financed companies increased substantially, allowing simultaneous release of films all over India and wider and faster circulation through secondary circuits. For the first time, a film could

[198] Editorial, *Moving Picture Monthly*, Annual Issue, 1935 in Bandhopadhyay (1993), p.27.
[199] *BC*, 11 Nov., 1933.
[200] *BC*, 31 Sept., 1933.
[201] *BC*, 23 Sept., 1933.
[202] *BC*, 11 Aug., 1934.
[203] *BC*, 8 July, 1936.
[204] Interview with Virchand Dharamsey.
[205] *EIC*, p.256.
[206] *BC*, 9 Jan., 1935.
[207] *BC*, 27 Apr., 1935.

be seen simultaneously in various parts of the same city. *Chandidas* was shown simultaneously in Chitra and Purna for a total of 38 weeks.[208] The companies could afford to run their production in the halls they owned or had stable contracts with for weeks on end while simultaneously exploiting shorter runs in other halls. Multiple productions from the same studio could be shown simultaneously in the same exhibition area, an option available to silent-cinema studios only late in their career. While four New Theatres films were being shown at the Edward in January 1935, its new production *Karwan-e-Hayat* was being shown at the Minerva around the same time.[209] This meant that profits not only increased, but the rate of returns, that was such a problem for producers in the silent era, improved dramatically in this period, providing the financial security that the industry had aimed for from its earliest days. However, this meant that the studios increasingly found it unnecessary to cater to cinema halls without 'bona-fide audience'.

What ultimately gave the new filmmakers the crucial edge was their ability to secure the best halls and the services of the costliest personnel in the industry. The new distribution system heavily favoured the bourgeois newcomers. The enormous profits from the films were ploughed back into publicity, stars and better productions. A distributor like Kapurchand, who owned a number of cinema halls and was the distributor for both the New Theatres and Bombay Talkies films, helped serve newcomers. He financed the New Theatres and Bombay Talkies production regime as well.[210] In the wake of the breakdown of the Madan monopoly, he and the Globe circuit emerged as the new oligopolists in the exhibition and distribution market.[211] A large number of exhibitors owned multiple cinema halls that covered different classes of audiences. Kapurchand owned the posh Roxy and the downmarket Super cinema on Grant Road. BN Sircar owned Chitra in South Calcutta for Bengali releases and New Cinema in Central Calcutta for Hindi ones.[212]

Although older styles of cinema continued, upper-crust films produced by reputed studios now radically transformed their depictions of sexuality to correspond to the literary values of bourgeois fiction. The transformation was not an easy one. Companies like Imperial, that had specialised in promoting an erotic imagery of stars like Sulochana, now turned towards socials in the 1930s.[213] By the late 1930s, both Imperial and Sulochana had been sidelined by new social-oriented studios like Ranjit, Sagar and Bombay Talkies. In 1934, Ajanta studios, that had specialised in romance-adventure extravaganzas, resolved 'to concentrate on productions of contemporary interests to bring home message of social interest'.[214] As part of this new resolve, Ajanta commissioned Munshi Premchand to script their 1934 film *Mazdoor/The Mill* that dealt with labour issues. The film ran into censorship trouble, was a flop when released and ran Ajanta out of business.[215]

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[208] *VW*, 25 Mar., 1933, p.10.
[209] *BC*, 2 Feb., 1935.
[210] *EIC*, p.166.
[211] Interview with R Sidhwa.
[212] *Calmanac* – the official homepage of the city of Calcutta, http://www.calmanac.org/cmcnew/interface/frames.htm
[213] Its main productions in the mid-1930s were *Samaj ki Bhool* (1934), *Do Ghadi ki Mauj* (1935), *Hamari Betiyan* (1936) and *Sarala* (1936). Although it did produce an occasional adventure-romance film, its production regime was clearly turning towards socials. Information from *EIC*.
[214] *BC*, 11 Aug., 1934.
[215] *EIC*, p.259.

The Reorganisation of the Industry

The representational strategies of any film culture are determined by what Robert E Kapsis describes as 'the interorganizational network of production companies, distributors, mass-media gatekeepers, the retailers', the conflicts between them, and 'the market, pressure groups and censorship, statute law and government, technology'. Complex networks of interorganizational relationships mediate 'between the movie production company and the consumer'. How films get made depends on "how organizational gatekeepers at various stages of the film production process assess the product in relation to their perception of audiences' 'future tastes'."[216] The creation of the moral framework for Bombay cinema was indeed the product of a complex network of interests seeking to maximise profits and ambitions through the formulation of an 'interorganizational network'. This led to the creation of a 'cultural perspective' that far from being the product of an hegemonic ideological vision of the intellectual elite, the state or the businessman, was the product of a series of play-offs between parties seeking to establish a balance of interests. Praising the success of the films of Prabhat and New Theatres, a critic exulted: 'Now the public forms the judge.'[217] Here was a clear indication of what the bourgeois critic meant by public opinion – not popular choice, but refined and elite choices made by the bourgeois spectator, sanctioned by nationalism, media, business and social reform at the expense of other cultural forms. The public(s) that had made earlier forms of cinema hugely popular were consigned into the bin of history. Only when popular and elite choices coincided to some extent could a public be conceptualised.

The success of the bourgeois take-over in Bombay lay in the concatenation of its social and cultural discourse of professionalisation of art with the economics of the realist cinema. In the 1920s, a growing number of specialised art journals such as *Roopam* were published from various cities and presented a considered mix of articles by academics, artists and amateur specialists on Indian art and culture. Existing cultural journals like the *Modern Review* began greater coverage of the arts in addition to their usual fare of literature, politics and history. The 1920s were also the heyday of Shantiniketan culture and the Bengal, Bombay and Punjab art schools that were further disseminated in magazines, newspapers and journals. Theatre, music and dance were slowly influenced by experiments in these cultural movements. The sudden increase in the volume of such cultural activism in the 1920s and 1930s marks the expansion of the consumer class and its corresponding commercial viability.

The immediate fall-out of the professionalisation and simultaneous commercialisation of art was the rise of the notion of the individual bourgeois artist, best exemplified by the cult of Tagore. His very presence in the fields of painting, music, dance, theatre and cinema provided a powerful legitimising force for public cultural projects by the bourgeois young. Modern art was adopted as a nation-building activity by the Congress when Nandalal Bose was commissioned to decorate the precincts of the Congress session at Haripura in 1936.[218] The artist was emerging as a rising star in bourgeois self-imaging exercises and the modern individual artist's profession was, for the first time in Indian society, becoming a paying proposition. The rise of bourgeois cinema in the 1930s was intimately related to the rise of the

[216] Robert E Kapsis, 'Hollywood Genres and the Production of Cultural Perspective' in BA Austin (ed.), *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics and the Law*, v.5 (Norwood, 1991) quoted in Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London, 2000), pp.228-229.
[217] *VW*, 17 Feb., 1934, p.9.
[218] On nationalist art of the 1930s, see Guha-Thakurta (1992).

modern bourgeois artist. This is evident from the number of personnel in the Bombay and Calcutta industries who were involved with other neo-traditional modern artistic and cultural movements.

The studios themselves took on a more 'public' role by making donations to charitable causes.[219] The industry elaborated a series of public rituals to anoint its artistic presence in society. The mayor of Bombay attended film premieres.[220] The governor of Bombay visited the Ajanta studios in 1934.[221] Lilavati Munshi, wife of KM Munshi, opened the Famous Cine Laboratory at Dadar.[222] The prime minister of Nepal visited the Krishna studios to investigate the possibilities of promoting Nepalese cinema.[223] In Calcutta, BN Sircar, the future head of New Theatres, got Subhash Chandra Bose to open Chitra on 30 December, 1930. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee performed the opening ceremony for the second hall Sircar owned – New Cinema.[224] As with bourgeois theatre in the 1920s when Art Theatres Limited's production of *Karanarjun* was opened by the historian Haraprasad Shastri[225] and the opening of Bhaduri's *Seeta* was graced by cultural bigwigs like Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, RD Banerjee and Acharya Narendra Deb, the new cinema's performance space was consecrated by associating the cinema hall with figures denoting high culture.[226] In addition, the industry organised a variety of rituals to project a respectable artistic image. Ranjit instituted the Gohar medal for excellence in cinema. The magazine *Varieties Weekly* instituted the Varieties Medal to felicitate good films, their directors and performers.[227] The Hindu ethnoscape was seeking the blessings of the cultural and political elite of the times who were themselves producers or patrons of the ethnoscape. Unlike the local elite of Lahore, these were figures of national importance with a greater presence in the national media. They were more powerful 'organizational gatekeepers'. There were no takers for *bazaar* cinema in this class.

However, superlative success in the second-run cinema halls could help an outsider peddling non-consensus films gain a firm foothold in the top-grade market. The case of Wadia Movietone is a classic example of how a top-rung silent movie production company was sidelined by the new kind of cinema, only to bounce back through the enormous success of its populist fare. The Wadia brothers were among the more sophisticated silent film producers specialising in the stunt-film genre. When they resumed stunt-film talkie production in 1935 with *Hunterwali*, they had little access to the big cinema halls in Bombay. The big distributors would not touch the film and Wadia went ahead and released it at Super Talkies, that still showed American stunt films.[228] The enormous success of the film had the distributors scurrying back to Wadia for an all-India release. The film became the biggest hit of all time and firmly established Wadia amongst the top studios of Bombay. By 1936, the Wadias had their own hall – the Lamington (probably the Super) – dedicated

[219] Various companies donated money towards the Bihar Earthquake Fund in 1934. Imperial contributed the most – rupees 1251 from its proprietor plus rupees 1001 from the company, *VW*, 9 Mar., 1934, p.16.
[220] *TOI*, 4 May, 1935. The film concerned was *Bikhare Moti*.
[221] *The Indian Review*, Oct.1933, p.693.
[222] *BC*, 15 July, 1933.
[223] *VW*, 4 Nov., 1933, p.16.
[224] *Calmanac*: the official homepage of the city of Calcutta, http://www.calmanac.org/cmcnew/interface/frames.htm
[225] Mukherjee (1982), p.161.
[226] Mukherjee (1982), pp.185-188.
[227] *VW*, 10 Feb., 1934, p.10.
[228] Interview with Homi Wadia.

exclusively to their home productions.[229] Its star, Nadia, became one of the first female superstars of the talkie era. Nadia, who began her show-biz career in Madame Astrova's circus (Astrova had been active in Bombay around the turn of the decade),[230] was thus a continuation of the older cinema order in which heroines from any social background could make it to the screen and become superstars through blatant glamour and daredevilry. Indeed, Wadia explicitly created the Hunterwali persona in opposition to the heroines of the silent film era who were forever prostrate before their husbands and elders.[231] However, New Theatres director Debaki Bose wept while watching *Hunterwali*, for, according to him, it went against all the ideals he stood for.[232]

Wadia's films and the bourgeois reaction they elicited, set against the distribution politics of the day, revealed the economic roots of the bourgeois discourse about morality in the Bombay industry in the 1930s. In a period of transition when several new companies were jostling for exhibition space, morality became a potent weapon for finding a niche in the market. It is striking that charges of sexual laxity in the 1930s were most frequently levelled against Madan and established companies in Bombay and the new fly-by-night producers with large capital outlays who could block exhibition space through sheer money power. For a newcomer, there were two options – either to make a social with a good cast or to make an extremely successful popular film. Both depended heavily on music for success. New Theatres, Prabhat and Ranjit took the first route to success; Wadia took the latter. Bombay Talkies and Sagar, interestingly, stuck to the middle path mixing social realism with attractive production styles, performative verve and glamorous star values. In this competitive scenario, the bourgeois players entering the market managed to strike a balance between their interests in ways that favoured them against the interests of both smaller and established companies. The paying power of the middle classes who espoused Hindu ethnoscapic entertainment heavily favoured the new filmmakers in the economic logic of distribution. However, even in the mid-1930s, the battle-lines were hardly secured. This is apparent from contemporary discourse on studio practice.

The editorial of *Varieties Weekly* dated 8 July, 1933, demanded that 'jobbery must go' in the studios. Attacking production and employment methods in the Bombay studios, the editor criticised attempts to rationalise production that led to 'cliches' and staginess in films. Faster productions meant inferior products.[233] Another editorial referred to an article by NG Devare, Kohinoor's erstwhile cameraman and director, in which he accused the 'master producers of Bombay' of 'gunrunning' artists, seducing them with bribes and high salaries. He went on to accuse the studios of promoting 'placard popularity' of artists that resulted in the stars' 'heads being inflated'.[234] Implicit in this argument was resentment against the established studios for using capital to corner the stars and inflating the costs of films by their ability to pay the stars better.

At the other end of the spectrum, the new companies churning out popular films were targeted for criticism. 'Too many companies with short capital start off… Bad films are well advertised and sold… People with a few thousands or a few

[229] *BC*, 11 Mar., 1936.
[230] *BC*, 6 Sept., 1930.
[231] Interview with Homi Wadia.
[232] Interview with P Jairaj.
[233] Editorial, *VW*, 8 July, 1933.
[234] Editorial, *VW*, 2 Sept., 1933.

months at foreign studio becoming directors boasting foreign stint,' went one report about the condition of the industry. This, according to the author, led to 'substandard films' and 'bad films by small and inexperienced concerns throw bad light on the industry'.[235] This was the age-old argument that bad films kept financiers away from the market due to the uneven financial returns that ensued from reckless speculation. Thus the morality of Wadia's films was even more suspect when they managed to occupy some of the prestigious market niche meant for 'respectable' productions.

In contrast, the new studios like Prabhat, New Theatres and Bombay Talkies began with 'respectable' capital. Prabhat was set up in 1929 as a co-operative[236] and Bombay Talkies was backed by the leading businessmen of Bombay. New Theatres was backed by respectable businessmen like BN Sircar, son of Sir NN Sircar, member of the Viceroy's Council. He had good relations with the British and had even invited the Viceroy to his studios.[237] For this class, the organisation of the studios on modern corporate lines was taken for granted. New Theatres began with a stable of the best talent available in the market. The givenness of this organisational 'respectability' added to the confidence with which critics and filmmakers could argue for a Hindu ethnoscapic cinema over the cosmopolitan one.

The dual critique of established Bombay studios and populist newcomers was crucial in a period when exhibition space was expanding rapidly but not fast enough to keep up with the demand for films. Most threatened by the push and pull between established companies and small-time producers were the middle-rung 'respectable' companies like New Theatres and Ranjit. It is not surprising that these companies were at the forefront of the tirade against Madan and the new filmmakers. It must be remembered that *Varieties Weekly*, one of the magazines that carried out the morality campaign against sections of the Madan, Bombay and Punjab film industries, was a mouthpiece for New Theatres, directly subsidised by them. While the top and bottom-rung companies churned out popular films, the middle-rung companies used respectability, professionalism and music to make steady progress. The fact that these companies were seen as innovators as compared to the bigger Bombay studios was underlined by a rhetorical 'Question of the Week' posed in the *Chronicle* (a feature the paper ran through the mid-1930s in its cinema pages): 'If big studios lack enterprise, are smaller ones to be blamed for experiment with talent and topics?'[238] Clearly critical opinion was in favour of the middle-ground companies promising respectable fare.

However, the power of the 'respectable' producers was backed by other institutions as well. There are indications that distributors increasingly intervened in the production routine of films. For example, when JBH Wadia wanted to introduce a cabaret scene in one of his films, the distributors objected, forcing him to excise the scene.[239] Saadat Hasan Manto, writing about the Bombay industry in the mid-1930s, mentions story sessions with producer-distributor *seth* figures who manipulated the script to suit the market.[240] For distributors serving the middle-class market, it was safer to back conservative films since any bourgeoisie-backed dissent by informal

[235] MK Hoosain, 'What Indian Film Industry Needs', *BC*, 30 Oct., 1935.
[236] *EIC*, p.178.
[237] Gautam Kaul, 'Cinema and Freedom Struggle', *The Tribune*, 22 Aug., 1998.
[238] *BC*, 12 Feb., 1936.
[239] Amaresh Mishra, 'Wiggly Desires',
http://www.tehelka.com/channels/ane/2000/oct/19/ane101900wriggly.htm
[240] Sarwat Ali and Asha'ar Rahman, 'Eight Decades of Progress', http://www.jang-group.com/the news

moral-pressure groups would have harmed business prospects. Political force could have been used to threaten erring distributors or exhibitors.

This was brought home by the fate of Sagar's *Zarina*, made in 1932, starring Zubeida and Jal Merchant. It was an enormous hit in Lahore but raised a storm in the press for its 86 kisses. According to BR Chopra (the editor of the Lahore film magazine *Cine Herald* and later a leading filmmaker in Bombay), the film triggered off a 'volcanic event' and 'the people' managed to get it off the halls.[241] This even after the censor had officially passed the film and despite its huge commercial success. For the purposes of discussion about the links between industrial self-regulation and the economics of the film industry, this incident reveals the kind of losses a film company could undergo if the moral content of a film was found wanting by political or cultural activist groups.

As new respectable companies started producing successful films through the mid-1930s (mainly due to the popularity of their music), their hold on the market grew. They cornered the big stars and the best technicians, which raised the prices of films. This again proved advantageous to distributors, who accordingly raised film prices. 'Artistic' films meant better profits. For exhibitors too, a steady middle-class clientele was more profitable than showing films of all kinds indiscriminately. It needs to be emphasised that the transformation of production and exhibition in this period was bracketed by the phenomenal all-India success of the talkies. Thus, not only did the respectable companies succeed commercially, they did so courtesy the magical potency of a single genre – the social film – reaching the widest audience possible. This in turn allowed the new film personnel to conceptualise the entire industry as a composite unit serving a composite audience base which could now be characterised as the 'nation'.

The economic ascendancy of the combine of a new generation of filmmakers was backed by the increased activism of the Motion Pictures Society of India (MPSI), dominated by Chandulal Shah, owner of Ranjit, one of respectable Bombay's studios. When it came to choosing films to be sent abroad for film festivals, it was Shantaram's *Amar Jyoti* that was sent to Venice.[242] The industry had begun to project a collective and unified face for itself, further legitimised by the external recognition conferred by invitations for entries to foreign film festivals. This process culminated in the formation of the Indian Motion Picture Producers Association (IMPPA) in 1936. The IMPPA maintained close relations with local politicians and used their clout to manage inter-company disputes.[243] It was dominated by the more respectable elements of the industry, again including Chandulal Shah and Ardeshir Irani. It included all the major film-producing combines in India. BN Sircar was president of the Bengal provincial council of the IMPPA.[244] Thus the first official regulatory bodies of the industry were products of the new class configuration in the wake of the talkie boom. Over time, they were able to control the moral framework of the industry until official censorship was introduced after Independence.

Organisation of the various wings of the industry into combines functioning as organised bodies was crucial to the institutionalisation of the Hindu ethnoscapic social as the norm for film production. The IMPPA was at the head of a number of organised

[241] BR Chopra, 'Censorship – Before and After Independence', http://www.expressindia.com
[242] *TOI*, 4 Oct., 1936.
[243] Gautam Kaul, 'Cinema and Freedom Struggle', *The Tribune*, 22 Aug., 1998.
[244] *Proceedings of the Indian Motion Pictures Congress* (Bombay, 1939), p.179.

film interests that included distributors, exhibitors, technicians, journalists and performers. In 1939, it organised the first Indian Motion Picture Congress (IMPC) in Bombay that brought together various industrial organisations. Thus a single chain of command was formulated, through the latter half of the 1930s, encompassing all the functional bodies of the industry.[245] Every part of the industry was now responsible for the proper functioning of the other parts as well. Any trouble even at the most local level of film circulation, for example, at a cinema hall in a small town, would theoretically affect the industry. An agitation of the scale launched against *Zarina* affected industrial strategy in a substantial way. The second half of the 1930s saw increasing pressure on the industry from Hindu fundamentalist organisations posing as cinema morality groups that demanded that Muslim performers not be cast in Hindu roles, especially religious ones.[246] There was a general tirade against the excessive presence of Muslim performers in the industry. The IMPPA was substantially involved in these controversies. Since producers were increasingly becoming beholden to distributors and exhibitors in a quasi-official manner, any trouble at the level of distribution and exhibition would now have to be dealt with by changing production strategies. In addition, many of the players involved in the organisations were themselves conservative people. This meant that the industry became more vulnerable from outside pressure. The state (especially when represented by a Hindu cultural nationalist like KM Munshi, minister in the Bombay government) and informal pressure groups could now manipulate the industry by challenging a film at any point in its transit from production to exhibition and holding it ransom to the industry's own claims to respectability. In a period when the industry was, for the first time, coming together as a quasi-official organisation, such considerations were paramount for the respectable heads of the IMPPA. Falling back upon standardised family entertainment and stirring monumental stuff would have been a safe bet for the bosses from all points of view. They ushered in the 'dawn of a new cinematic millennium' by ensuring that 'no one releases films unless of satisfactory value.'[247]

Indeed, there are indications that their reputations were becoming increasingly dependent on keeping the conservative wing of Hindu politics happy. The dominance of the discourse of secularism in cultural circles ensured that the Hindu response to religious threat from Muslims was seldom articulated on the screen. The drama of religion was played out off-screen, although its active presence was increasingly felt in the Bombay industry from the mid-1930s. Critics increasingly grew conservative about the cultural representation of characters along lines of religion and nationality. Wrote a critic about Eurasian and Jewish actresses,

> They should not be expected to correctly interpret the feeling, the sentiments, the spirit underlying the theme in a purely religious and social drama…They might memorise Urdu-Hindi lines, look well, graceful, but when it comes to real acting…correct interpretation of Indian sentiments it is a different tale.

He went on to propose the use of 'Hindustani actors for Hindustani roles'. Parsis, Eurasians and Jews were, not 'oriental enough'.[248] The talkies accentuated the problem by making the standard of speech in Indian languages a deciding factor in the cultural reception of films. By contrast, Pahari Sanyal was lauded for his classical

[245] Information from the *Proceedings of the IMPC*.
[246] For the activities of the All India League of Film Censorship, Cinemagoers Association and the Cinema Congress Association of India, see MSA, HPD files, 245/1937-1938.
[247] *TC*, Nov.1933, p.13.
[248] SN Kaul, 'Indian Cinema: Some Suggestions', *BC*, 9 Feb., 1936.

training in music at Lucknow's Morris College and for his 'real Oriental grace' in New Theatres' *Rajrani Meera*.[249] Morris College was one of the earliest sites for the invention of Indian 'classical' music through text-based musical pedagogy, a course that included training the *tawaif*s.[250] In the years to come most Eurasian, Jewish and Parsi performers were edged out of the industry. Claims for cultural essentialism based on a notion of the intrinsic religious or communal identity of the performer were gaining ground in the industry. This commonsensical logic dictated that only Hindus could play Hindu characters. This went well with the logic of the ethnoscape where the construction of a territory as an 'ancestral homeland' implied that the inhabitants of a particular culture were imbued with a mysterious intuitive sense of their own culture and were therefore best placed to interpret it. Of course, this was only possible when a substantial section of the Hindu upper class-upper caste elite had made its presence felt in the industry. Only this made it at all possible to realistically carry out any such change in the promiscuous order of cultural representation in Bombay films.

The critique seems to have worked quite substantially. The presence of Muslim performers in the industry was whittled down, either by excising them from the cast or by giving them unimportant roles. Actors like Jamshedji or Mazhar Khan, who were heroes in the silent era and the early talkies, became villains in the new order of things. The immensely popular Muslim singing stars could not initially be put down, but once playback technology was established, that need was obviated as well. Another way of dealing with Muslim stars was to give them Hindu names, a trend that continued until the 1950s. For example, Amjad Khan's father, Zakaria Khan, was rechristened Jayant. However, there are indications that Muslims were actively marginalised from Bombay in the years leading up to Partition. Manto had to leave the industry because his communal identity was problematised by a network of distributors and producers. He describes how the manager of Bombay Talkies received threatening letters from various communal organisations for employing Muslims in high positions in the company.[251] AR Kardar, who fled Lahore following the moral outrage against *Zarina*, restarted his career in Bombay only to go back to Lahore during Partition.[252] According to Manto, he was 'betrayed' by Baburao Patel, editor of *FilmIndia* and forced to go back to Pakistan.[253] When Devika Rani, an upper-class Hindu actress eloped with Najamul Hussain, a Muslim actor, the scandal rocked the industry. Around the same time, there was uproar when Shyama Zutshi, an 'educated' Hindu Sindhi actress was cast opposite a Muslim actor, Nissar, in Ajanta's *Afzal*. She was withdrawn from the film under parental pressure and due to the 'unhealthy propaganda carried on by some of the communal organs'.[254] It is significant that there was no opposition to Hindu men acting opposite Muslim women.

Again the historical context of the 1930s provides the backdrop for these developments. The 1920s saw an escalation in communalisation of the cultural world of North Indian cities and towns that led, by 1930, to a call for the boycott of *all* Muslim performers by Hindus. Against this, a petition from the Muslims claiming

[249] *VW*, 25 Nov., 1933, p.12.
[250] Chinchore (1990), p.25.
[251] Manto (1998), pp.73-74 .
[252] Gazdar (1997), p.29.
[253] Manto (1998),p.190.
[254] *BC*, 27 Mar., 1933.

'Prostitutes, players of native drums and buffoons, bhagtiyas (dancing boys) have all been Musalman for centuries' and a loss of patronage along religious lines would mean the demise of these arts.[255] In addition, by the late 1920s, there was an active discourse in Hindu society about the degradation of Hindu women due to Muslim lust. Widows and young unmarried women were deemed especially vulnerable to abduction by gangs who, after selling them to Muslim customers (requiring multiple wives), sold them to brothels where they became courtesans or prostitutes. Conversion to Islam was, of course, a fundamental element of the discourse.[256] Thus the new Hindu elite posed both as patron and moral guardian of the new cultural order; and in times of a cultural war, more often than not the roles coincided.

These attitudes connecting religiosity, sexuality and the courtesan with a particular patronage order had been rife in historical fiction, theatre and cinema where the lasciviousness of Muslim rulers was routinely depicted by their attendance at *nautch* performances. The Hindu hero or heroine in *nautch*-girl disguise gaining entry into the Muslim camp was a favourite motif of such fiction and performance. In *Poona Raided* (1926), Aurangzeb's general Shaista Khan was shown in the harem, 'enjoying with prostitutes, freely drinks wine in her company',[257] while in *Yashodevi* (1927), 'Prince Salim has been painted in a scene showing him drinking and enjoying the music of the dancing girls in the War Camp'.[258] The *nautch*-girl disguise to enter the Muslim camp was popularised by the story of Gora and Badal who entered Alauddin Khilji's camp disguised as dancing girls to partner Padmini in her *nautch* performance for Alauddin. The Padmini story was repeatedly filmed in the silent era due to its extreme popularity amongst the Gujaratis. By connecting the Muslim ruler to *nautch*, the films sought to stereotype Muslims as historically rapacious and the institution of *nautch* as a transcendental symbol of Islamic culture in India. In scholarly musings on Indian performative traditions too, Islamic patronage was seen as a corruptor of 'earlier' pristine Hindu dance and music:

> Music was earlier dedicated to religious purpose and so was dance till they were subsequently prostituted by interested performers for the entertainment of the luxurious. Pious hymns changed to love ditties…this in a short time could not fail, amongst so voluptuous a people as the degenerate sons of India, to be changed into that effeminate, meretricious style in which it is at present.[259]

Expunging Islamicate idioms from mainstream culture would have to include expunging the *tawaif*'s art and the *tawaif* herself. Only then could the new Hindu elite reform the patronage order of the rapacious Muslim ruler.

The achievement of the neo-traditional Hindu filmmakers in this period was to have captured some of the key positions in the 'interorganizational network' at the expense of the Parsi and Muslim filmmakers, producers and distributors, who though not entirely sidelined, increasingly became secondary and in most cases subordinate to Hindu capital and talent. What needs to be stressed is that the take-over was seldom

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[255] Charu Gupta, 'Hindu Women, Muslim Men: Cleavages in Shared Spaces of Everyday Life, United Provinces, c.1890-1930', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Apr.-June, 2000, pp.131-132.
[256] For example, OIOC, L/PJ/6/1917, Letter from DM Karachi to Commissioner of Sind dated 30 Jan., 1928, p.512, on trafficking of women in Sind and their conversion to Islam and subsequent descent into prostitution.
[257] MSA, HPD files, 91/1926.
[258] MSA, HPD files, 263/1927.
[259] Tagore (1926), p.58.

directly communal. As seen, bourgeois cinema exercised a commonsensical power since the industry had been seeking respectability and the early talkie success of certain respectable films made the canonisation of bourgeois cinema obvious for everyone to see. Moreover, the bourgeois critique of popular Islamicate entertainment was veiled in the language of class, a critique that even the reforming Muslim middle class would have endorsed. Communal sentiments expressed were in turn subsumed within the common sense historical critique of the aristocratic past that formed an important element of reform discourse. In the light of the new organisational strategies of the industry, the formulation of the Hindu cinematic ethnoscape created a discursive framework through which communalism could edge out or subordinate all vestiges of popular Islamicate cinema. The rest was taken care of by intricate networks of money, information and power that made the sustained production of elite films possible in the first place.

The Elite Popular Cinema in Bombay, c.1936

The emerging national consensus did not go uncontested, at least in the 1930s. Highly commercialised oral-performative cultural traditions were central to the identities of the towns and cities of the Islamicate heartland of north and north-west India: traditions lacking outside this region. The performative was not just a folk adjunct to literary culture as it was in the regions dominated by brahmanical culture, it was central to regional identity. The challenge to the bourgeois consensus against the performative in cinema was evident when *The Cinema*'s editorial for April 1932 attacked the critics from 'Bengal, Madras and Bombay' for criticising films 'not from the audience's point of view but from the writer's'. According to the editor, these critics were happy with 'only a few good songs or if acting was good in general' but in the case of the Hindustani talkie, 'the pronunciation of Hindi and Urdu as well as intelligibility of songs and dialogues' counted to make a success of films. Carrying his argument to a logical extreme, the editor concluded – 'only the Punjab and UP can pass verdict on good or bad talkies.'[260] The editor of *The Cinema* emphasised the charms of well-recorded declamatory dialogue and singing as features significant enough to make films a success. The Lahore critics were also extremely appreciative of the dancer's art in cinema. Tara and Sitara were praised for pronouncing 'Hindi words as best as any literary man could do' and for their excellent acrobatic dances.[261] The reviewer of Kardar's *Wandering Dancer* (1931) admired the way 'Roohiya [glided] like a nymph in the air' while dancing.[262] For these critics, the spoken word and the performative did not contradict each other. *Zarina* did not necessarily contradict *Devdas*. The partisan support for regional film styles was an indication that aesthetic evaluation of terms such as 'actor' and 'acting' varied from one place to another. Singing and dancing were not universally inimical to the art of 'acting'.

Here the stress was on the delectation of oratory, sound, music, movement and performance in its physical texture. The appreciation of story and acting depended on the texture of performance conveyed not through its moral message, but through the aesthetics of the senses. An actor who could sing in well-delivered Urdu would be appreciated more for his skills in language and song than for his acting. For that matter, critics from Punjab felt that 'tragedy is bred in marrow and bone of Bengal' that was fine for the 'well bred' but was resented by 'the lower classes'. They felt that

[260] *TC*, Apr. 1932, p.11.
[261] *TC*, Sept.1933, p.17.
[262] *TC*, June-July, 1931, p.29.

the Bengal version of a tragic *Puran Bhakt* went against the popular version of the story in Punjab where it was 'a comedy'.[263] The performative was hitting back at the literary canon of national culture, an irony made all the more acute by the differing versions of the same canon in completely disparate generic registers. Another critic attacked 'grandpa's morals' by defining the 'twentieth century youth' as one who 'reads Stopes, Lawrence', thinks about 'companionate marriage' and therefore was utterly opposed to puritanical values in sexual matters. The critic further went on to delineate the harmful effects of 'starving men and women of adequate dose of sex' thus turning them into 'nervous wrecks'. For the critic, cinema allowed the sublimation of the romantic inclinations of the young. Puritanical films could only have a harmful effect on society.[264] Punjab film culture seemed to have been following an entirely different trajectory *vis-à-vis* the erotic and the performative from that defined by upper class-upper caste critics of the Bombay cinema.

In the 1930s, it was still possible to air such drastically divergent views before the deluge of monolithic bourgeois nationalism in the 1940s. This was possible because of the competitive film cultures of which the film magazines themselves were as much products as they were symbolic of the competition itself, based as they were on patronage of the film cultures they represented. The vitriolic bourgeois attack against the *bazaar* cultural world reflected competition with it rather than outright bourgeois snobbery towards popular culture. In the marketplace of culture, the elite had to compete with established norms of popular cultural practice. As seen in Chapter Four, economic competition between the bourgeois film companies and Madan was couched in the language of cultural competition and regional chauvinism. Madan and the Marwari producers were not only blamed for bad cinema, but they were also accused of 'exploiting' Bengali talent, by buying up that the best performers. Markets, performers and audiences were still in thrall of *bazaar* entertainment. Two schools of cinematic skills with different takes on social change were in economic combat. Indeed, the irony of the situation is borne out by the fact that Baburao Patel, editor of *FilmIndia* and the man who had 'betrayed' Kardar, felt that only *mianbhai*s (Muslims) knew how to make films 'because no Hindu was capable of equalling the style, methodology, technique and artistry which was natural to Muslim directors.'[265] By 1947, however the *mianbhai*s were being forced to flee Bombay not least due to the efforts of people like Patel.

Social-realist cinema was yet to become the hegemonic cultural paradigm for cinema. In this period of experimentation, even New Theatres produced Hindi films like *Karwan-e-Hayat*, *Yahudi ki Ladki* and *Mohabbat ke Ansu* using the polymorphous talents of an actor like Saigal who, as mentioned earlier, was also the star of *Chandidas* and *Devdas*.[266] Not only were the former films (that could qualify as exotic Oriental dramas) based on the Parsi theatre repertoire, but even a Hindu ethnoscapic film like the Hindi version of *Chandidas* was written by Aga Hashr Kashmiri, the doyen of the Parsi theatre. This indicates how similar the performative ethos of the Parsi theatre-style film and the *bhakti* films, and by extension that of the early social-realist cinema, were. This also shows how the ethnoscapic action of the Hindu bourgeoisie appropriated elements of Islamicate culture to convey emotive affects of the Hindu ethnoscape. While there were differences in décor, dress and language, the

[263] *FL*, 4 Mar., 1933, p.16.
[264] RC Sawhney, MSc., 'Sex Films and Morals', *TC*, Aug.1933, p.35.
[265] Manto (1998), p.190.
[266] *EIC*, p.203.

musical and acting style of films like *Yahudi ki Ladki* and *Chandidas* were very similar. And when Saigal sang Wajid Ali Shah's *Babul Mora* in *Street Singer* (1938) the transmutation of the Parsi-Urdu stage ethos into the Hindu social-realist cinema reached a new level of maturity. Saigal, a product of the same culture that had created the Parsi stage and its singing and dancing stars, could span the entire gamut of performative skills from the classical to the popular.[267] The immense popularity of music meant that all companies depended upon trained singers who could also act, usually from what the bourgeoisie saw as the dubious realm of the popular stage. The film cultures competed through hectic sloganeering for the same pool of performers. The competing discourses on cinema aesthetics in the early talkie period demonstrate the overlaps between elite and popular culture, characterised by a remarkable mobility of performers from one film culture to another.

Yet the subsequent discourse on Saigal chose to emphasise his classical aspect by canonising his social-realist cinema or by extracting his songs for autonomous canonisation without reference to the films, thus entirely eliding his connections with the Parsi stage tradition. Gone were the days when classical music was taught to the upwardly mobile bourgeois young through Parsi stage songs.[268] Just as Bhatkande was willing to accept only the classical part of *nautch* culture (with exclusive reference to Sanskrit musicological texts) at the expense of its more erotic and popular 'light classical' content (the Islamicate traditions), the historical discourse on Indian cinema has largely hidden the shared cultural world from which both the Parsi theatre-oriented cinema and the social-realist cinema emerged. Saigal's singing style was in the *kotha* (courtesan's quarters) tradition.[269] However, Saigal's 'light classical' repertoire was 'classical' enough for the cinema's purposes and therefore acceptable. Other performers, not as versatile as Saigal in blending the *kotha* style with bourgeois-realist acting styles, were consigned to oblivion. Saigal's neo-traditional *Devdas* singing *kotha* songs with a slight tinge of *Rabindrasangeet* indicates how the dominant ethnoscape was now Hinduising the Islamicate legacy of Indian culture.

It appropriated performers like Saigal, groomed them through narratives and the star system and radically altered the critical discourse about 'actors' and 'acting'. Richard deCordova notes that the formulation of the star system coincided with the institution of the cinema of 'narrative absorption' as well with a radical redefinition of critical discourse on 'acting' and 'actors'.[270] From now on, performers could dance in attenuated variations of the *kotha*-style, but display none of the attendant eroticism. This substantially differentiated the reform of the 1930s from that of the 1920s. Such a division of popular culture into elite and 'popular' registers had not yet occurred in the early 1930s when film cultures were competing for performers from similar backgrounds in areas such as Bhatti Gate in Lahore or the continua of the theatre-red light areas of Bombay and Calcutta where courtesans and bourgeois youth rubbed shoulders.[271] Over time, memories of such propinquity of class and performance genre were obliterated. The composite cinema culture in Lahore, centred around Bhatti Gate, was split between halls in the Bhatti Gate area and the more upmarket cinema halls of the city. Now 'low class' cinema and *mujras* (*nautch* performances) went

[267] Nevile (1999), pp.174-175.
[268] Interview with Narendra Shrimali.
[269] *EIC*, p.203.
[270] deCordova (1990),
[271] For a description of the active youth patronage of *mujra* in north Indian cities, see Nevile (1999) and Manto (1998).

together in the 'low class' localities, while realist theatre and cinema moved to upper-class localities. Grown-ups and those with an interest in romantic themes went to the McLeod Road halls, whereas the more boisterous young crowd saw stunt and fantasy films in the Bhatti gate area. The latter was also the area where adventure cinema reigned supreme.[272]

Most of the criticism of the popular cinema was a reflection of the paranoia of an upper class-upper caste Hindu elite that encountered the heterogeneity of *bazaar* culture for the first time. As a class hell-bent on carrying out its role as cultural censors through active involvement in popular culture, the bourgeoisie had to change the *bazaar*. Previous attempts at reform had been launched from the outside and had remained peripheral to the actual workings of popular culture. The anti-*nautch* offensive, for example, began in the 1890s, but only became effective in the 1930s when bourgeois performers entered the stage in large numbers and became involved in radio broadcasting. This was a bourgeoisie that as late as 1894, when Parsi theatre was fully established, could claim, 'There is no public life in our country', revealing their cultural distance from the *bazaar*.[273] A few decades later, confronted with the *bazaar* culture as players in the film market, they labelled it eroticised, Islamicate, low class, commercialised and unreal. Finding themselves ranged against this culture and yet at its mercy due to their practical need to find talented public performers, they proceeded to classify it in order to suit their tastes and needs. As in the case of *nautch*, where the bourgeoisie quickly realised that there was no 'classical' Indian music or dance outside *nautch*,[274] the cinema bourgeoisie sought to appropriate talented *bazaar* performers through the media discourse on artisthood and social reform for national regeneration. A company like New Theatres used *thumri* (albeit mixed with *Rabindrasangeet*) as did the popular cinema.[275] While the New Theatres appropriation became the acme of the modern-classical, the popular cinema's music was a symbol of India's decadent past. By 'classicising' the classical they sought to separate the 'gem from the dirt'.[276] Saigal was the gem, while Nissar, the singing-star at Madan's, was the dirt.

Despite the fact that the 'All-India Film'[277] that emerged as the run-of-the-mill Bombay production in the 1950s retained Islamicate cultural norms in watered down and barely-Hinduised forms, the discourse on what was considered valid cinematic art had definitely swung towards the monumental style of the Hindu ethnoscapic vision. And it was this vision that guided most of 'parallel' cinema from the 1950s onwards. Bombay cinema, by contrast, languished in the prisonhouse of popular culture.

[272] Nevile (1999), p.152-167.
[273] *Opinions on the Nautch Question* (Lahore, 1894), p.24. Henceforth *ONQ*.
[274] *ONQ*, p.17.
[275] Ambarish Mishra, 'Days of Glory: A Flashback to the New Theatres Studio', *Cinema in India*, Apr.1992, p.40.
[276] *ONQ*, p.11.
[277] On the All-India Film, see *EIC*, p.41.

Epilogue

One might conclude with a story.[1]

One day (possibly in the 1940s), an Englishman, whose father had served in the British Army during the events of 1857, came to visit Khwaja Hassan Nizami - a leading Urdu writer of his times. In the course of their discussions the two fell into an exchange of notes about 1857 and its implications for Indian society since Nizami's father too had been involved in it. 'What happened to the Muslims after the revolt,' asked the Englishman to which the writer replied – Do you want me to show you or tell you what happened to us after 1857? The choice offered by the ageing Nizami baffled the objective calm of the Englishman. At this, the writer called Mijji Mian, his cook, and pointing towards him said, 'This is the visual document of what happened to the Muslims after the revolt. Mijji is a great-great grandson of Bahadur Shah Zafar – last *badshah* of Hindustan'. Then he went on to recount a story about Mijji.

Once, not very long ago, the writer had visited Rangoon with the sole purpose of visiting the tomb of Bahadur Shah Zafar. He happened to be accompanied by Mijji Mian on this pilgrimage. It was afternoon, close to three o'clock, that both stood facing the imposing, but now decaying monument where the last Emperor of India rested. Seeing the dilapidated mausoleum and its state of disrepair the writer collapsed into tears, reminded as he was of the great glories of the Mughals reduced to such demeaning squalor as that faced him. M oments of mourning later, the writer turned to Mijji Mian only to find him distracted and fidgety. Noticing his master's acute distress, the cook gently asked him if anything was the matter. At this his master broke down into further paroxysms of grief, lamenting how the grandeur of Mijji's forbears had been reduced to dust. 'Don't you feel distraught at the thought of the lost Golden Age of your ancestors? Once who were mighty emperors now lie in a manner of neglect not even befitting a commoner', asked the writer of Mijji. At this Mijji Mian regained his distracted and fidgety look and in sorrowful tones said – All this is fine but could he, his master, hurry up matters a bit since he had a ticket for the matinee show. He would not wish to miss the show which he would if he was delayed any further.

It is entirely probable that the film Mijji was going to watch was a routine song-and-dance affair for which Bombay cinema has become justly famous. It is also probable that the hall he was patronising located in the *bazaar* – a definitely down-market affair. The thesis has been, in many ways, the reconstruction of the ways in which a spectator like Mijji Mian came to be marginalised from the cultural discourse of cinema. The paradox of Khwaja Nizami's reaction that was representative of much of the elite's response to *bazaar* Bombay cinema was that this cinema was directly heir to the courtly grandeur of post-Mughal successor state culture heavily derived from Mughal courtly practice itself. However, the cinema derived from it did not fit into the vision of an elite that wanted a monumental style for cinema. Risqué sexuality and frivolity of representation of moral dilemmas did not suit the elite palate.

However, the central irony of Nizami's story raises questions about the status of a spectator like Mijji. Was Mijji, a resident of Delhi and working for an elite Urdu writer, an unproblematic member of the masses? As has been indicated, the culture of the North Indian *qasbah* town would defy analysis along a definite divide between elite and popular spectatorship. The grandeur of courtly traditions was somehow

[1] I am grateful to Prof Muzaffar Alam for recounting the story to me.

filtered into the masses through sights and sounds that might have been modifications of elite culture, but they bore the stamp of the court in no uncertain manner. The trajectories of the diffusion of courtly colours into the social fabric of the *qasbah* town are difficult to trace historically. But part of the answer lies in the complex relationship various schools of training in music, dance, wrestling and acting had with the court on the one hand, and with the *bazaar* on the other. It was entirely possible for students from the same school to go upwards (into the court) and downwards (into the *bazaar*) and yet maintain the stamp of the particular school they came from. Moreover, once a particular school produced performers for courts, this very fact acted as stamp of quality for all performers from that institution. Likewise, spectatorship along class lines was problematised by this fluid flow of talent into courts and *bazaar*s from similar training grounds. The rhetorical question that one could then ask is just how far were Khwaja Nizami and Mijji from each other as connoisseurs of culture?

The ironies actually lie on the side of Nizami's reaction to cinema. Indeed, the grandeur of the Mughal court was very much a product of the patronage of the performative arts and from that point of view, he would have very few problems in nostalgically considering the world of the courtesan as a symptom of that grandeur. As seen from the paradoxical reaction of the elite to the reform of *nautch*, classical Indian performative arts were entirely implicated in the continuum between courtly and *bazaar* culture. Even the reform of *nautch* could only hierarchise the performative world but could not do away with its eroticism. To come back to Mijji, does the Bombay cinema then manage to portray the reality of his world better than that of the bourgeoisie's? Or is the persistence of song and dance and other narrational features of Bombay cinema a symptom of the particularly complex spectator that Mijji, great-great grandson of Bahadur Shah Zafar and cook at the house of Khwaja Hassan Nizami, was? Or are they the secret life of the Indian bourgeoisie's connoisseurship of certain arts that nevertheless cannot be acknowledged in particular cultural contexts? An eminent critic could castigate the popular cinema for its regressive politics almost falling back upon the notion of the masses being infantile, yet the same critic would have gone to see Hindi films as a youth. Once grown up, however, the habit had to be disavowed. Casting back our eyes at Lahore film culture one found the audiences predominantly composed of college students and the working classes. If the ICC Report is to be believed, then at least forty percent of the audience was methodically taught to disavow their cinema habit for Bombay cinema in certain cultural contexts and pass on the technique of forgetting to subsequent generations.

The answer to such question is never simple. It maybe partially answered in the future by studying the changes in performance styles in the context of changes in the nature of patronage of performative cultures over time. The Bombay cinema remains a mosaic of skills drawn from different cultural institutions. Thus the study of patronage of Bombay cinema cannot be detached from the study of patronage of neighbouring cultural institutions. As seen in the thesis, a complex cultural bookkeeping between these institutions was maintained and is still maintained and it would not be surprising if it includes a sharing of economic labour of culture as well. Indeed, this cultural bookkeeping was not restricted to different performative traditions of *bazaar* culture, but between Islamicate 'classical' and popular culture as well.

The passing of Urdu has meant more than just the eclipse of the language in the cultural life of Indians. It has also meant that a particular relationship between the *bazaar* and technologically more sophisticated medium like the cinema has disappeared as well. A particular form of patronage that was responsible for the

popularity of the language across class and religious lines has disappeared. Ghalib's poetry was produced and consumed in the *bazaar*. The Hindu ethnoscape by contrast demands that performers be trained in the monumental style, something that the *bazaar* cinema did not excel at. However, there were contradictions in the construction of this ethnoscape that presumed that Hindus play Hindu characters on screen – some of its greatest stars were Muslim performers under assumed Hindu names speaking Urduised Hindustani until very recently. Is it possible that Urdu was the language of urban modernity *par excellence* and it was this appeal that made the continuum between the elite and popular culture possible through the efforts of a new generation of modern urbane Indians? Was it the route by which the *bazaar* was modernising, entering the portals of technological entertainment?

Moreover, it maybe asked if the demotion of *bazaar* cinema in the 1930s was actually responsible for the decline of the courtesan of the *bazaar*, causing a parallax error in the historical vision that reads back the present decadence of the art into its past. And more importantly, was the culture of the courtesan, even in its public forms, as disreputable as it is made out to be? Modernisation of the courtesan culture might have added new dimensions to its public reception that have hitherto been missed by scholars. The symbiotic relationships between various performative traditions would make this a valid question to ask. Indeed, as was seen, the efflorescence in cinema in Lahore also saw a short but significant rejuvenation of public dancing in the city. In north India, the rise of commercial romance literature in Hindi coincided with the rise of the romance-adventure cinema. Is the decline of the literary genre over the 1930s connected to the decline of the cinematic genre as well? Francesca Orsini notes that many of the writers driven out of the 'respectable' echelons of Hindi literature were welcomed into the film industry.[2]

The passing of the patronage structure of the Muslim elite remains significant for the Muslims in India. Nizami's story, despite all its contradictions, does manage to catch the poignancy of an ambiguous cultural situation in displaying Mijji as a symbol of Muslim decline in India as a whole. In doing so, Nizami, a Muslim, identifies with Mijji and at the same time expresses his inability to act as a patron for Mijji in a situation of inexorable economic and social decline of the community. But does his story hold a whiff of pride retained in decline in the emphasis he places on the very survival of Mijji despite the vicissitudes of history? Can it be seen as symptomatic of the gritty survival of Islamicate culture in India, albeit in the strangest disguises? Moreover, by identifying with the cinema-addict Mijji, is Nizami covertly acknowledging the centrality of the *bazaar* in modern Indian culture, an acknowledgement made increasingly difficult by the rhetoric of communalism that bashes Muslim culture as being decadent? In other words, does a cinema-mad Nizami reside at the heart of the elite writer Nizami, a reality that he can only allude to through allegories? Decadence can lie in the past, as in the case of 'historical' films like *Mughal-e-Azam*, but never in the present, a pressure that makes the Muslim middle-calls elite disavow *bazaar* cinema. Yet given the Sanskritisation of Urdu through television serials glorifying the Hindu past of India at the service of militant communalism, what happens to the connection between the histories of Islam, Mughal culture and the Muslims of modern India? The rolling back of Islamicate culture is not merely an economic phenomenon. It might also be symptomatic of pressures on a spectator like Mijji to choose between Hinduism and Islam. What needs to be seen is

[2] Orsini (1998), pp.208-209.

whether the bourgeoisie's attitudes towards song and dance in the cinema of the 1930s has in any way contributed to this situation.

Appendix

A Note on the Role of the Colonial State

As mentioned earlier, the colonial state displayed very little active interest in controlling the workings of the Bombay industry. Indeed, the colonial state figures very marginally in the thesis because of the extremely paradoxical position it occupied *vis-à-vis* the Bombay industry. On the one hand, it was responsible for the creation of film culture by controlling the nature of urban culture that included controlling transfer of technology into India and its subsequent use. It licensed cinema halls and machines, taxed stock and cinema tickets. It also created the rules for construction of cinema halls and the censorship laws for films. Yet it exercised very little direct control on the cultural parameters of the industry. Censorship of Indian films was far less severe than the control exercised on imported films. The colonial state was far more interested in controlling the moral texture of cinematic representations of Western culture. The cases of censorship of Indian films were few and far between.

In 1917, the government passed the Indian Cinematograph Act which was 'designed to ensure proper control of cinematograph exhibitions with particular regard to the safety of those attending them, and to prevent the presentation to the public of improper or objectionable films'.[1] Depictions of sexuality and violence and seditious acts were the chief targets of the censorship laws. Four censor boards set up in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Lahore thus covering the entire subcontinent. Censorship at the local level was variously handled by police officials or district magistrates. The Bombay censor board was headed by the Commissioner of Police and consisted of representatives from the Parsi, Muslim, Hindu and European communities plus other government officials. Two inspectors were employed to inspect films round the clock. Licensing of cinema halls was done under the rules regulating the control of Places of Public Amusement under the Bombay District Police Act, 1890.[2]

Much of censorship of Indian films consisted of cosmetic revisions of certain scenes and deletion or modification of intertitles. On occasions, protests by religious organisations (mostly Muslim) would force the hands of the government.[3] In matters of sexuality and violence, little was done to revise the moral tone of the film. Unlike post-1934 Hay's Code Hollywood where censorship was aimed at controlling production, censorship in India was largely a matter of following the rule book in matters of detail of already-produced films rather than controlling the moral framework of the cultural institution. The economic necessity of releasing films in the market flew in the face of censorial aims. As was repeatedly pointed out in the Indian Cinematograph Committee proceedings: if censorship rules were followed seriously, then no film could ever be released.

When Indian films were refused release or withdrawn, it was in response to particularly turbulent political conjunctures as happened in the case of Kohinoor's *Bhakta Vidur* in 1921 during the course of the Non-Cooperation Movement. The film had made too many direct allegorical references to nationalist symbols like *khadi*, the *charkha* and Gandhi making it an obvious target for censorship. The other times when the censors brandished the scissors was when particular films ran into trouble with

[1] *BJP*, 1917, p.1538.
[2] MSA, HPD files, 12/1926.
[3] For example, the case of *Ten Commandments* in 1926. MSA, HPD files, 55/1926.

political or communal organisations and had to be withdrawn as a result. Very few films were banned altogether, most being released with cursory cuts. Moreover, films with very similar contents as those that were banned were in circulation immediately before and after such incidents. By the 1930s films with nationalist names like *Azadi ke Deewane* (Lovers of Freedom) and *Desh Dipak* (Lamp of the Nation) were being released without any eyebrows being raised. Thus the colonial state did not exercise any long-term censorship policies, making any speculation on the influence of the colonial state on Bombay film culture extremely difficult. Having said this, it needs to be pointed out that the state need not have feared much by way of blatant infringement of political decorum in Bombay films since films were probably censored even before they were ever made. No film could hope to depict direct confrontation between white man and brown on screen. Allegorical uses of cinema for political purposes have been claimed by almost every filmmaker for every film made in this period making any historical analysis of this subject in the absence of data about actual consumption of these films extremely difficult.

However, the colonial state did express interest in the workings of the industry from time to time. It commissioned two reports on the cinema in the 1920s – one in 1921, called the Evans' Report and the other in 1928, called the Indian Cinematograph Committee Report. The Evans Report mostly focused on the possibilities of using the cinema as a propaganda machine in India to counter the perceived Bolshevik threat and to control the unfettered transmission of cinematic images into India that could be misused in the extremely fraught political scenario in the immediate aftermath of the World War. Nothing much came of the recommendations of the report. Indeed, more correspondence was generated by controversies as regards the payment of dues to Evans than on the report itself.[4]

The Government of India appointed the Indian Cinematograph Committee on the 6 October, 1927. T Rangachariar, a lawyer of the Madras High Court, was appointed chairman of the five-man committee that included AM Green, Collector of Customs and member of the Bombay Board of Film Censors, and J Coatman, Director of Public Information.[5] The committee was to examine the condition of the Indian film industry in the context of the resolutions of the Imperial Conference of 1926 which had floated the idea of Imperial Preference by pooling the resources of the empire and its colonies to counter the economic dominance of the United States. A resolution passed in the Legislative Assembly on the 15 September, 1927 declared that:

> A committee be appointed to examine and report on the censorship of cinematograph films in India, and to consider whether it is desirable that any steps should be taken to encourage the films produced within the British Empire generally, and the production and exhibition of Indian films in particular.[6]

Although the main interest of the colonial state was to determine the adequacy of censorship of American films and the scope for the application of the principle of Imperial Preference in the realm of film production, the Committee's proceedings had effects far beyond the objectives of the government. The report of the committee, presented in 1928, was based on an enormous amount of data collected on all aspects

[4] See OIOC, L/PJ/6/1671.
[5] A Vasudev, *Liberty and Licence in the Indian Cinema* (New Delhi,1978), p.35.
[6] *Indian Cinematograph Committee*, 1927-1928, *Report* (Calcutta, 1928), p.xi.

of the film industry in India through replies to interviews and elaborate questionnaires. The committee toured 12 cities, including smaller cities such as Jamshedpur and Kanpur. Evidence was also collected from neighbouring towns and cities.[7] Questionnaires were sent to members of local governments, heads of health and educational institutions, churchmen, social workers, local notables, politicians and in some cases, to ordinary people. In addition, members of the film industry and the press were consulted in great detail about censorship and the workings of the industry. The committee thus sought to keep as broad a base of response as was possible within the framework of the ICC's aims and objectives. This resulted in perhaps the most detailed national survey of a film-industry carried out in any part of the world.

However, on the basis of the reactions of the industrywallahs, the report rejected the Committee's recommendation of a quota for Empire while the report's recommendation of giving incentives to the industry by way of financial and infrastructural assistance from the government was rejected by the state. The state and Bombay cinema refused to come together yet again. However, the state was unanimous that American films needed to be censored more harshly on account of their tendency to lower the moral tone of society.

[7] Bombay was the centre for collection of evidence from a large *mofussil* town like Ahmadnagar.

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